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THE Nation.

THE RIGHT'S NEW CLASS WAR
AMY TRAUB

CHANGE AT SEIU?
MAX FRASER

IS THIS THE END OF THE WAR ON CRIME?

SASHA ABRAMSKY

JULY 5, 2010
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Exchange

Spinoza and Vultures and Gnats, Oh My!

PRINCETON, N.J.

Samuel Moyn, in "Mind the Enlightenment" [May 31], finds my "monomaniacal Spinoza worship" both "amusing and exasperating." Well, he is not half so exasperated as I am by his unbelievably inaccurate account of my argument.

He begins by saying that I have no "story of the Enlightenment's intellectual or cultural origins" other than Spinoza's genius. This is utter nonsense. Both main volumes published so far give a lengthy account of the Enlightenment's origins, setting out various social and cultural factors but pivoting on the philosophical revolution of the late seventeenth century with no fewer than six great philosophers extensively contributing to laying the intellectual foundations—Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Bayle and Leibniz.

All helped shape the moderate and radical wings of the Enlightenment. Bayle's contribution takes thirty pages (in "Enlightenment Contested") to explain. Spinoza is held to have surpassed the others in contributing to the Radical Enlightenment essentially because he goes further in undermining belief in Revelation, divine providence and miracles, and hence ecclesiastical authority, and because he was the first great democratic philosopher. But all contributed, as did dozens of other writers and controversies.

Moyn next pontificates that it is a "faulty premise" to "think that a philosophy of naturalism and liberal-democratic politics are inextricably linked." He cites the example of Hobbes, which he thinks proves his point. Here, his objection is wrong both philosophically and historically. The official Enlightenment presided over by Frederick the Great and other leading rulers vigorously upheld aristocracy, ecclesiastical authority and strict censorship, maintaining that subjects had no right to question the commands of their sovereigns or the divinely given status of the social order they upheld. The only way to break the ancien régime system conceptually—and deliver comprehensive freedom of thought and a democratic politics—was to destroy the notion that the existing order was divinely authorized, directed by divine providence and legitimately presided over by the clergy and monarchy. Hobbes got around this but only by introducing the unwieldy construction of a once and for all, indissoluble political contract canceling out men's natural rights, the force of which in terms of naturalism is hard to discern. Here, Hobbes was an inconsistent naturalist and Spinoza merely ironing out his inconsistency.

Still more inaccurate, Moyn complains that "Israel ends up with no explanation for why his package of emancipatory values succeeded except that they are true," that my only explanation is that Spinoza was such a surpassing genius that his ideas caused a revolution.

I say nothing of the kind. First, the emancipatory values propagated by the Radical Enlightenment did not succeed. They partially succeeded briefly with the advent of the French Revolution, but from 1793 their achievement was derailed by the Terror and later by Napoleon. The nineteenth century then involved further setbacks for democratic, enlightened values.

As for radical ideas succeeding better than the moderate Enlightenment of Montesquieu, Voltaire and Hume in the 1780s, this is explained by a highly complex historical argument: in a nutshell, the moderate Enlightenment suffered from failure to deliver the toleration, law reforms, emancipation of oppressed groups, or reductions in aristocratic and ecclesiastical privilege that many wanted and also from intellectual difficulties in balancing reason with tradition and faith. It was weakened further by the rise of the Counter-Enlightenment, which claimed that faith and authority, not reason, are the true guides of men.

Particularly important in explaining the process, in my account, is the fact that the mechanics of late eighteenth-century revolutions (there were revolutions in several other countries as well as America and

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Lipstick on a Pig

First, let's swallow hard and be fair. There is something to cheer in the so-called Year of the Woman. You don't have to credit the Republican Party, which did next to nothing

COMMENT

to bring on the wave that swept Carly Fiorina, Meg Whitman, Sharron Angle and Nikki Haley to victory in June's primary elections. Indeed, before the RNC began heralding its Mama Grizzlies, in Sarah Palin's typically catchy but grating phrase, it was brushing off complaints about how its roster of 104 rising "Young Guns," lavished with party attention and resources, included only seven women. Fiorina and Whitman bought their gleaming California wins with their own money, while Angle charged to victory in Nevada on sheer Tea Party adrenaline. There's certainly nothing progressive about these women, but their brash, unapologetic and largely unsolicited emergence in Republican politics—in American politics—does represent progress, of a sort.

That being said, it's maddening that a party that has resisted every advance of feminism and undermined women's economic strength at every turn now claims to embody "the overall triumph of the women's movement," as *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat put it. To appreciate the breadth of the chasm between the party's symbolism and its substance, consider the subject of working mothers. Some of today's GOP women, like many more Democratic women before them, have indeed broken barriers by campaigning around the clock with young children at home. But what does it mean to be "comfortable" with the spectacle of a working mother, as Douthat claims Republicans now are, when you oppose the very supports that would make the lives of working mothers comfortable?

Fresh new faces aside, the Republican Party's stance on the issues that matter to working mothers is as regressive as it has ever been. Recall how Republicans in Congress, at the behest of their corporate backers, tried mightily to block President Clinton's Family and Medical Leave Act, which granted women the right to take unpaid time off to have a baby and still keep their jobs. The passage of the FMLA in 1993 was a real advance, but it is hardly sufficient. Because so many more men have lost their jobs in the Great Recession, an increasing number of families depend on a female wage-earner's paycheck to survive, and many women simply cannot take unpaid time off to care for a baby without imperiling their families. President Obama slipped $50 million into his budget proposal to aid states interested in addressing this problem by guaranteeing paid leave. But this item, along with nearly all the other expenditures to blunt the pain of the downturn and restore economic health, has no support from Republicans, who have signed countless pledges to freeze spending, cut taxes and reduce the deficit, regardless of the human consequences.

The new GOP women are at the front of the fiscal conservative pack. Fiorina, for example, signed the Taxpayer Protection Pledge put out by Americans for Tax Reform, promising as a US senator to oppose any new taxes on California citizens or businesses—this when the state desperately needs federal help to close its $19.1 billion deficit and is poised to slash daycare, welfare, public school, and drug treatment programs and services for the poor. Obama has proposed another round of stimulus, which would put $50 billion into state coffers to ease the crisis California and other states are experiencing, but fiscal conservatives like Fiorina and South Carolina's Haley (who stands by Gov-

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ernor Mark Sanford's notorious decision to refuse federal stimulus money) oppose such intervention.

The fiscal crisis in the states cuts to the core of women's economic security: as Heather Boushey of the Center for American Progress points out, women are suffering the brunt of it because they make up 60 percent of state and local government employees, and they depend disproportionately on the social services, such as childcare, that states provide. Although the first wave of this recession hit men hardest, Boushey says we are undergoing a shift toward job losses for women as cuts in the public sector mount. The reductions in childcare subsidies that states are contemplating, for example, will affect a workforce that is 95 percent female; and at the same time, the loss of services will surely make holding jobs impossible for many former welfare recipients who now, thanks to Democrat-inspired welfare reform, have nowhere else to turn. Women caught in this crisis definitely can't count on the GOP's new female leaders for solidarity. California's Whitman—she of the $1.3 billion eBay fortune—pledges to reduce the lifetime limit on welfare from five years to two if she is elected governor. Nevada's Angle, who makes Sarah Palin look like Eleanor Roosevelt, not only opposes all stimulus spending but wants to phase out Social Security and, for good measure, the IRS.

It's insidious how Republicans are deploying women candidates to pitch government belt-tightening to women as the "keepers of the family budget," as if the stresses of working families are increased by childcare, healthcare, eldercare, afterschool and other social programs. New Hampshire's Kelly Ayotte, the Tea Party favorite running for the Senate, who signed the Club for Growth Repeal It healthcare pledge, declares, "You can't spend money you don't have. Like most New Hampshire families, Joe and I sit around our kitchen table, and we have to prioritize and live within our budget. Our government should be no different." This analogy is not only flawed—the state, unlike individuals, must create the conditions for economic prosperity—it ignores how families frequently borrow money to invest in their future, to pay for education, for example. It's not clear this message is resonating with women. According to a new survey by the Ms. Foundation for Women and the Center for Community Change, women—especially women of color, low-income women and single mothers—are more likely than men to believe the government should take a more active role in making the economy work (a majority of men believe this too).

It's one thing—and not a small thing—to celebrate the strength of women in politics. But it's supremely cynical to do so, as the GOP Year-of-the-Woman revelers have, while working to undercut the strength of women in society. Now, will the real Mama Grizzlies please rise up? BETSY REED

War on Public Workers

Conservatives have declared a new class war, but it's not on bankers earning seven-figure bonuses. Instead, as Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels told *Politico* recently, the "new privileged class in America" is government employees, who "are better paid than the people who pay their salaries."

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We have to escape "public sector unions' stranglehold on state and local governments," agreed Mort Zuckerman, billionaire editor of *U.S. News & World Report*, "or it will crush us." Meanwhile, the *Wall Street Journal*'s Paul Gigot ominously predicts "a showdown looming across the country between taxpayers and public employee unions over pay and pensions," while the Heritage Foundation warns that "the more the government taxes, the more it can pay its unionized workers."

COMMENT

This decades-old assault on government employees has acquired new potency at a time of widespread economic suffering and populist rage. But the attacks have little basis in reality. A recent study by the Center for State and Local Government Excellence and the National Institute on Retirement Security finds that when such factors as education and work experience are accounted for, state and local employees earn 11 to 12 percent less than comparable private sector workers. Even when public employees' relatively decent pensions and health coverage are included, their total compensation still lags behind workers in private industry. A separate analysis by the Center for Housing Policy finds that despite recent declines in home prices, police officers and elementary school teachers still don't earn enough to buy a typical house in two out of five metro areas. Firefighters and librarians are unable to afford the median home in the New York, Los Angeles and Chicago metro areas. Nationwide, a school bus driver's wage isn't enough to pay rent on a standard two-bedroom apartment.

Despite American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funding, which preserved jobs and public services, city and state workers have been affected by the recession. The Economic Policy Institute reports that 180,000 local government employees have been laid off since August 2008, while furloughs have become a fact of life for public workers across the country. Much bigger cuts lie ahead: Education Secretary Arne Duncan warns that as stimulus funding dries up, as many as 300,000 teachers and other school personnel could lose their jobs this year to budget cuts.

The lavish lifestyle of public workers is a myth, but the right-wing mythmakers know it's a powerful talking point. By attacking public workers, they can demonize "big labor" and "big government" at the same time, while deflecting attention from the more logical target of Middle America's rage: the irresponsible Wall Street traders, whose risky, high-profit business practices brought down the economy, and the lax regulators who let them get away with it.

At its heart, the scapegoating of public employees is an insidious way to divide public and private sector workers who share many of the same interests. The Manhattan Institute's Nicole Gelinas, for example, cynically argues that cutting pensions for transit employees is an act of "pure social justice" because it might spare minimum-wage workers higher subway

Noted.

BENDING TOWARD JUSTICE: On June 11 US Attorney **Jim Letten** announced the indictment of three New Orleans police officers and two former officers in the shooting death of **Henry Glover**, an African-American resident of New Orleans who bled to death while in police custody in the days after Hurricane Katrina struck. One of the former officers, **David Warren**, was charged with shooting Glover to death, according to the indictment. If convicted, he could face the death penalty, the *Times-Picayune* reports.

After Glover was shot outside a shuttered Chuck E. Cheese in the neighborhood of Algiers, his brother and two passers-by came to his aid, driving him to a temporary police base that had been set up at a local grade school. There, two of these good Samaritans were beaten up while Glover bled to death nearby. Glover's body was later found inside a torched car that had belonged to **William Tanner**, one of his would-be rescuers.

The indictment charges Lt. **Dwayne Scheuermann** and Officer **Gregory McRae** with civil rights violations for these assaults and with destruction of evidence for burning Tanner's car with Glover's remains inside. Lt. **Travis McCabe** and former Lt. **Robert Italiano** were charged with obstructing a federal investigation for altering and concealing documents and covering up evidence related to Glover's death. Italiano and McCabe also face perjury charges.

Glover's suspicious death was first reported in *The Nation* as part of a lengthy investigation by **A.C. Thompson**, in collaboration with **the Investigative Fund** of The Nation Institute, into vigilante attacks that took place in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. (**ProPublica** provided additional support.) Thompson's work has been recognized with the James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism; the Molly National Journalism Prize, named in honor of the late **Molly Ivins**; and the top magazine honor of the 2009 Investigative Reporters and Editors Awards. Thompson was also a finalist for the 2010 Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting.

When Thompson was reporting the story in 2007 and 2008, Tanner's torched vehicle was still sitting, abandoned, on an earthen levee overlooking the Mississippi River. A forensic pathologist who examined Glover's remains told Thompson, "My first reaction was that it was a homicide." Amid the charred bones and ash were metal fragments, which might have been the remnants of a bullet; the burned remains struck the pathologist as a likely attempt to cover up the crime. But after what appears to have been a cursory inquiry, Orleans Parish coroner **Frank Minyard** ruled the death "unclassified." The Nation Institute had to sue Minyard to obtain Glover's autopsy report. The NOPD had never even opened an investigation.

"If the NOPD ever bothers to learn who set fire to Glover," Thompson wrote in "Body of Evidence" (January 5, 2009), "the department's first step should be questioning its own personnel: a trail of clues leads right back to the police force." **Eric Holder**'s Justice Department has spent a year connecting those dots.

Henry Glover was a father of four and is mourned by a large extended family. "We want justice done," his sister Patrice told Thompson in late 2008, tears in her eyes. "We wanna know who did it." ESTHER KAPLAN

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fares. Absent is any disussion of raising the minimum wage or of more progressive means of funding the transit system. Low-wage workers aren't Gelinas's real concern; they're just a rhetorical device in her assault on public employees.

The desired result is clear: there will be less pressure to address the decades-long erosion of pay and benefits for most working people in the private sector if public anger can be focused on the bus mechanic who still has health coverage. With a slim majority of all union workers employed in the public sector, the conservative class war amounts to dragging unionized public employees down to the level of contingent no-benefits workers before they can leverage their power to help private sector workers raise their own workplace standards.

Then there's the "big government" angle. To the right, the budget crises engulfing American cities and states stem from one cause: as Nick Gillespie of *Reason* repeats ad nauseam, "They spend too much!"—especially on the supposedly lavish compensation of public workers. This simplistic narrative ignores how the nation's deep recession has shrunk city and state tax revenue and omits the fact that plummeting stock markets have decimated government pension funds. To the extent that conservatives succeed in reducing fiscal woes to a case of runaway spending, politicians find it easier to address budget shortfalls with public sector furlough days, wage freezes, layoffs and benefit cuts than with progressive tax increases that, many economists conclude, would cause the least harm to the recovery.

This orchestrated assault may already be working: witness formerly proworker politicians like New York's Democratic gubernatorial nominee Andrew Cuomo's attempt to demonstrate toughness by proclaiming, "We are going to be tangling with public employee unions."

Yet it's a short step from lambasting public workers to rejecting the very idea of public goods and services—and of government itself. With the nation still reeling from the harm caused by underregulated markets, conservatives are using city and state budget crises to call for across-the-board privatization, entrusting unaccountable private companies with an ever greater share of the public good. At the same time, the myth of the overpaid public employee is being used to undermine a range of progressive priorities, from financial reform to job creation bills like the Local Jobs for America Act, which would boost the economy by preserving public services and public sector jobs. It's time for progressives to fight back and confront the falsehood.

AMY TRAUB

Amy Traub, director of research at the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy, has written about labor and workplace issues for numerous publications.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Right-Wing Women Win Big in Primary Voting

These women won a lot of races,
Which might mean we've kicked off the traces
And now don't have a ceiling made of glass.
Still, we're not shouting, "You go, girls!"
The politics beneath those curls
Tempt us instead to mutter just, "Alas."

Tear Gas in Cananea

When the Mexican government moved to bust the three-year miners' strike in Cananea on June 6, it brought 2,000 Federal Police into the tiny mountain town in the state of Sonora—two cops for every striker. As darkness fell and helicopters clattered overhead, they charged the gate with riot shields and batons, filling the streets with tear gas. Miners retreated to the union hall with their families, and the police followed, barricading the doors and lobbing more tear gas inside.

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The union's leaders were already in hiding, since the police had arrest warrants for them all. Manny Armenta, an organizer for the United Steel Workers who's probably spent more time in Cananea than at home in Arizona, helped lead women and children down fire escapes and through the basement to safety.

The same day, police moved on the widows of sixty-five miners who had died in an explosion four years ago at the Pasta de Conchos coal mine in Coahuila. Women were forcibly removed from the mine gates where they'd been camping, asking for their husbands' bodies. Grupo Mexico, the mining and railroad giant that owns both facilities, is closing the mine for good without recovering the men's remains.

Both the Cananea strike and the widows' protests highlight extremely unsafe conditions in Mexican mines. At Cananea, silicosis-causing dust from crushed copper ore rises to miners' knees inside the buildings. Grupo Mexico disconnected the dust extractors several years ago, in retaliation for earlier protests. At Pasta de Conchos, dozens of uncorrected violations for dangerous methane buildup preceded the 2006 explosion.

But the Cananea strike goes beyond health and safety issues. For three years the Mexican Union of Mine, Metal and Allied Workers, commonly known as the Mineros, has challenged the National Action Party (PAN), which has governed Mexico since 2000, and its corporate backers, especially Grupo Mexico and its owners, the Larrea family. In turn, Mexican President Felipe Calderón has systematically sought to destroy the Mineros, as well as other unions that defy him. Last fall he fired 44,000 members of the left-wing Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME) and dissolved their state-owned employer, the Power and Light Company of Central Mexico. Progressive unions believe that destroying the SME would remove another union challenge while preparing the way for privatizing electrical power generation. SME members fasted in protest and were

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beaten this spring at the gates to the power plants.

In the face of these attacks, the Obama administration has been silent. Armenta believes the attack on Cananea's miners is the consequence not just of Calderón's antilabor policies but also of tacit US support for them. "Our government continues to give the Mexican government millions and millions of dollars, saying it will be used to fight drugs," says Armenta. "But we see here clearly that this money is going to fight workers and progressive people."

On May 19 Calderón was feted at a state dinner at the White House. Leaders of the Steel Workers union met with administration officials, asking them to tell Calderón they wouldn't tolerate an attack on the miners. AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka and Canadian Labour Congress president Ken Georgetti wrote to Washington and Ottawa with the same demand. According to Armenta, officials "assured us they were not turning their heads away. That was totally false." Eighteen days after the banquet, police attacked the Cananea miners.

The Mineros used to be a loyal ally of the old Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which governed Mexico for seventy years. But Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, who took over the union in 2001 from his father, a PRI stalwart, had much more militant and democratic ideas. He quickly forced employers, including Grupo Mexico, to concede much higher wage increases than those mandated by then-President Vicente Fox. Gómez helped defeat Fox's reform of Mexico's labor laws, a proposal recommended by the World Bank that would have eliminated the right to strike and other protections and social benefits for workers. After the Pasta de Conchos explosion, he accused Grupo Mexico of "industrial homicide."

The government reacted violently. It accused Gómez of corruption, forcing him to flee to Canada to avoid arrest, where he has lived ever since. A government-backed effort to install a pro-company union leader was twice rejected by the workers, who re-elected Gómez in exile. All the legal actions against him led to his exoneration, but the government still threatens to jail him if he returns to Mexico.

In June 2007 the Mineros struck the Cananea mine over safety conditions. The following January, after police beat dozens of workers in an attempt to break the strike, 25,000 Mineros members struck in protest at ten mines and at the huge steel mill in the port city of Lázaro Cárdenas. Two workers were shot and killed there, where the turmoil continues. This year twenty more were beaten when they shut the mill down again and marched in the streets.

Government-dominated courts and labor boards have repeatedly declared the strike at Cananea legally "nonexistent," a decision allowing Grupo Mexico to fire the strikers and install a company union. After Calderón won election in 2006, with major contributions from the Larrea family, the labor board gave legal status to a new, company union, or *charro*. A rump election and the firing of 1,500 workers at a neighboring copper mine in Nacozari led to recognition there of the company union, followed by similar moves at several other mines.

According to the Mineros, Labor Secretary Javier Lozano recently held meetings with mine owners, offering government recognition of the *charro* union in order to get out of contracts with the Mineros. Calderón himself was recently the guest of honor at a Mexico City bash hosted by the Chamber of Mines. "The government and the Larreas are making history, but backwards," the union responded after the occupation of Cananea, "trying to return to an era when we had no right to strike or right to industrial safety."

Smashing the Cananea strike will lead to the same massive firings that followed an earlier lost strike in 1998, and the destruction of the union in Nacozari in 2006. When that happened, waves of desperate miners, unable to find other employment, crossed the border into the United States as undocumented workers.

"Especially here in Arizona with the new law, all we hear about is illegal immigrants," Armenta says. "But our own government is creating this problem. I condemn the Mexican government, and Grupo Mexico. But I also condemn the US government for allowing this to happen, for not taking any action. What do they think will happen here? Where do they think all the miners will have to go?"

DAVID BACON

David Bacon is a California-based writer and photographer. His latest book is Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants.

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This week marks the start of a new collaboration between *The Nation* and GRITtv. Each week *Nation* editors and contributors will join Laura Flanders in the GRITtv studios to expand on the reporting and analysis in the magazine. To kick off **The Nation on GRITtv**, Katrina vanden Heuvel and Melissa Harris-Lacewell joined Laura to consider whether 2010 is the year of the (conservative) woman. Jeremy Scahill talked about WikiLeaks, Afghan minerals and the possible sale of Blackwater; and Dave Zirin joined Laura to discuss the right wing's disdain for soccer.

To make room for its thriving ecotourism industry, Tanzania is violently forcing villagers off their land, reports Marc Perelman in his investigative piece **In the Shadow of the Serengeti**.

Col. Ann Wright, retired, who joined the Gaza relief flotilla, came to the *Nation* office to talk about the blockade and the IDF attack. Listen to her remarks in **Nation Conversations: Col. Ann Wright on Israel's Raid**.

On the **Dreyfuss Report**, Robert Dreyfuss asks, Now that we know Afghanistan is sitting on $1 trillion in minerals, is the trillion-dollar war worth it?

Where did 2008's promised postelection progressive moment go? In **The Obama Presidency: Possibility or Peril?**, Ari Berman reviews Robert Kuttner's *A Presidency in Peril*.

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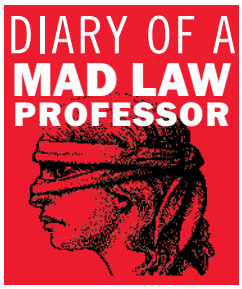
Patricia J. Williams

Semaphore

Some years ago, artist Dread Scott presented a controversial installation titled "What Is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?" In one area of the gallery he invited visitors to write down their thoughts while standing on what he described as a real American flag spread on the floor. The entire exhibit was designed to pose the question of what a flag is, really. What's an unreal flag? A fictional flag? When is its image "art" or advertisement or re-creation for the purpose of commentary or individualized expression? If it is iconic, then what is the representative American story embodied in its iconicity?

This year, the Fourth of July comes at a vexed moment for our national symbol; frankly, if I were the flag, I'd be completely tuckered out. The marketplace for patriotism has the Stars and Stripes working overtime—in the form of bumper stickers, T-shirts, wind socks and chest tattoos. The World Cup ushered in a healthy harvest of flag-emblazoned windbreakers, headbands, jockstraps and leather balls. One can find automotive dealers using the flag to sell trucks; Christian Identity churches using the flag to promote white supremacy; and supermarkets using the flag to push chicken breasts, swizzle sticks, tortilla chips and toilet paper.



When *The New Yorker* ran its controversial cover of the then-campaigning Obamas in radical drag, complete with an image of the flag "crisping" in the Oval Office fireplace (as editor David Remnick described it), many readers cited "bad taste." It is interesting that collectively we seem to have greater tolerance for bad taste when the flag is used in, say, a wrestling competition, wrapped around the fist of He-Man the Hulk as he punches Ruli the Russki repeatedly.

While I believe that every one of the uses cited above is in poor taste, I think the more interesting issue is that they are all technically against the law, as described in our Flag Code: the flag should never be used as "wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery." It should never touch "the ground, the floor, water, or merchandise." It should not be placed anywhere it could be "easily torn, soiled, or damaged in any way," nor should it be "used as a receptacle for receiving, holding, carrying, or delivering anything." No part of the flag should be used in any "costume or athletic uniform," nor should it be "used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever" or "embroidered on such articles as cushions or handkerchiefs" or "printed or otherwise impressed on paper napkins or boxes or anything that is designed for temporary use and discard."

I suppose it goes without saying that this implicates the propriety of a coffin encrusted with red, white and blue rhinestones arranged in the shape of the Stars and Stripes. (Who's first to throw a shovelful of dirt on top of that entombment of the dearly departed?) But as we celebrate the birth of our nation with parades across America, it also indicts the inevitable aftermath—that litter of miniature paper flags on little sticks, stained with ice cream and children's fingerprints, covering the ground like flower petals, like crumpled paper napkins, so symbolic one moment, so entirely disposable the next.

Fortunately for all of us, the Flag Code is hortatory or advisory only. US Code, Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 8, details the rules of etiquette by which the flag should be handled, but the Supreme Court has consistently ruled that transgressions of those rules are protected by the First Amendment and are therefore not punishable either civilly or criminally.

Figurative expression is always an issue with or without the First Amendment. Whether one gets more upset because an antiwar protester burns the flag, or a neo-Nazi displays it next to a photo of Hitler, or an artist invites the public literally to stand on it is itself representative of the fluidity of cultural context and the diversity of American identity. The distress that for many accompanies some of these actions highlights as well the varied investments in iconoclastic, rather than multiple—including ironic—readings.

Indeed, perhaps the most powerful and interesting part of the Flag Code—Section 8, subsection (j)—says, "The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing." This is why, according to the act, "the lapel flag pin, being a replica, should be worn on the left lapel near the heart." So even a "replica" must be worn next to the heart, the metaphoric circulatory center of our constitution. But again, this all begs the question of what a "real" flag is, and what a "replica" is, to say nothing of an artistic representation.

This question is particularly interesting given the proliferation of customized flags generated by the Tea Party movement. There are scads of variations: the field of stars replaced by a picture of a teacup or a teapot or a giant Roman numeral II (supposedly indicating a second revolution) or a rattlesnake or President Obama's face, X'ed out. For those who ostensibly revere the flag and its traditions, these creative renderings ought to pose at least a bit of a dilemma in view of the language of Section 8, subsection (g) of the Flag Code: "The flag should never have placed upon it, nor on any part of it, nor attached to it any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture, or drawing of any nature."

We Americans must marvel at the ecumenism of ends to which our flag is put. Ours is a secular faith whose expressive freedom blossoms not only in the tacky little toothpick flags protruding from all those burgers and bacon-wrapped hors d'oeuvres but also in the quiet allowance of such variation. Let's hope that this variety is understood as pluralism rather than division and as the expression of an American identity that is the sum of its many parts, the mending of multiples and the tolerant engagement from which a living nation grows. ■

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Eric Alterman

'Cutthroat' Crybabies

"Helen Thomas's blue-padded seat in the front row of the White House briefing room has barely cooled," reports a breathless *Wall Street Journal* article, "but her former colleagues in the press are already climbing over each other to fill it." Bloomberg reporter Ed Chen, the departing president of the White House Correspondents' Association, told the *Journal*, "It's like musical chairs in elementary school, except it has the cutthroat viciousness of a snake pit." I realize I'm almost unnecessary here, but wait, this story gets even better. In a follow-up, CNN reporter Ed Henry, a board member of the correspondents group, is quoted saying he backs Fox: "When CNN bid for the front row in 2007, Fox could have challenged it and had a knock-down, drag-out fight like the one we might have this time. But they did the gentlemanly thing and said CNN had more seniority. I've got to honor that commitment."

OK, I'll admit it. This column can pretty much write itself: it's a perfect metaphor for the childish insularity and ego-driven myopia of the contemporary White House press corps, a group of self-important crybabies who grow increasingly irrelevant with the creation of every new news source, every individual blog post. But even so, they are worth a look. Is something wrong with this picture? Let me count the ways.

The entire focus of the White House press corps is on what happens inside the White House. While that's not irrelevant, neither is it what's really important. Reporters climb over one another like gerbils in a crowded cage, and for what? It's rarely to examine the consequences of any given policy—"substance," after all, is not their beat. (The atmosphere in the room is simultaneously so anti-intellectual and ahistorical that the Bush administration was able to employ a press secretary, Dana Perino, who said she had no idea what happened during the Cuban missile crisis.) What really gets journalistic juices flowing in this room is to try to catch someone, preferably the president, in a gaffe, an "off-message" remark, a private moment or an emotional outburst. This last goal has lately become a kind of obsession of this press corps, so offended are they by Obama's preference for calm, reasonable arguments.

Readers may recall that it was Mr. Henry who made a spectacle of himself at one of President Obama's earliest press conferences when he repeatedly demanded to know why the president was letting other politicians sound madder than he was about AIG's executive bonuses. "So on AIG, why did you wait—why did you wait days to come out and express that outrage.... It took you days to come public with Secretary Geithner and say, 'Look, we're outraged.' Why did it take so long?" Obama's answer: "Well, it took us a couple of days because I like to know what I'm talking about before I speak." Henry, believe it or not, actually took pride in this incident, later bragging, "From just a few feet away, I could see in his body language that the normally calm and cool president was perturbed." The same sort of silliness characterized an exchange between Press Secretary Robert Gibbs and CBS's Chip Reid in the briefing room on the president's reaction to the oil spill:

> REID: I haven't—have we really seen rage from the president on this? I think most people would say no.
>
> GIBBS: I've seen rage from him, Chip. I have.
>
> REID: Can you describe it? Does he yell and scream? What does he do?

According to Dave Briggs of Fox News's *Fox & Friends*, this rage is what the "country's been begging for." "Emotion, right? A little emotion!" added his colleague Eric Bolling the next day. (Though, for the record, polls show that Obama's approval ratings have remained steady for the past eight weeks since the oil spill, as they have pretty much done ever since his honeymoon period ended, according to the *New York Times*'s Caucus blog.) When Obama did offer a partial concession to the howling mob—declaring that he was trying to figure out "whose ass to kick" in an interview with NBC's Matt Lauer—Stanley Crouch, writing in The Daily Beast, aptly scored the president for submitting "to the kind of minstrelsy demanded of anyone, high or low, these days."

Then there's this matter of the legitimation of Fox News. As I have written over and over in this space, Fox is not a news network. It is a propaganda arm of a political movement, one that seeks to employ the Republican Party to serve the needs of corporate wealth, religious extremism and narrow-minded resentment against non-Christian, nonwhite Americans. As Media Matters argued in the wake of the debate over Thomas's seat, "Fox News aggressively promoted the 'tea party' protests, which Fox itself described as primarily a response to President Obama's fiscal policies, and uses its airwaves to engage in open advocacy against the White House and congressional Democrats. In recent years, at least 20 Fox News personalities have endorsed, raised money, or campaigned for Republican candidates or causes.... Republican parties and officials have routinely touted these personalities' affiliations with Fox News to sell and promote their events." (It is worth noting that Fox's reported competition, Bloomberg News, while much more dependable professionally, is devoted largely to providing news to businessmen and investors and spreading their laissez-faire ideology. The interests and views of working people and the unemployed, who lack sufficient disposable income for investment purposes, are of little concern, either to Bloomberg or much of the rest of the room.)

I don't have much sympathy for anyone who thinks Jews ought to "go home" to Poland and Germany, but face it, when it comes to crazy, Helen Thomas had plenty of competition. ■

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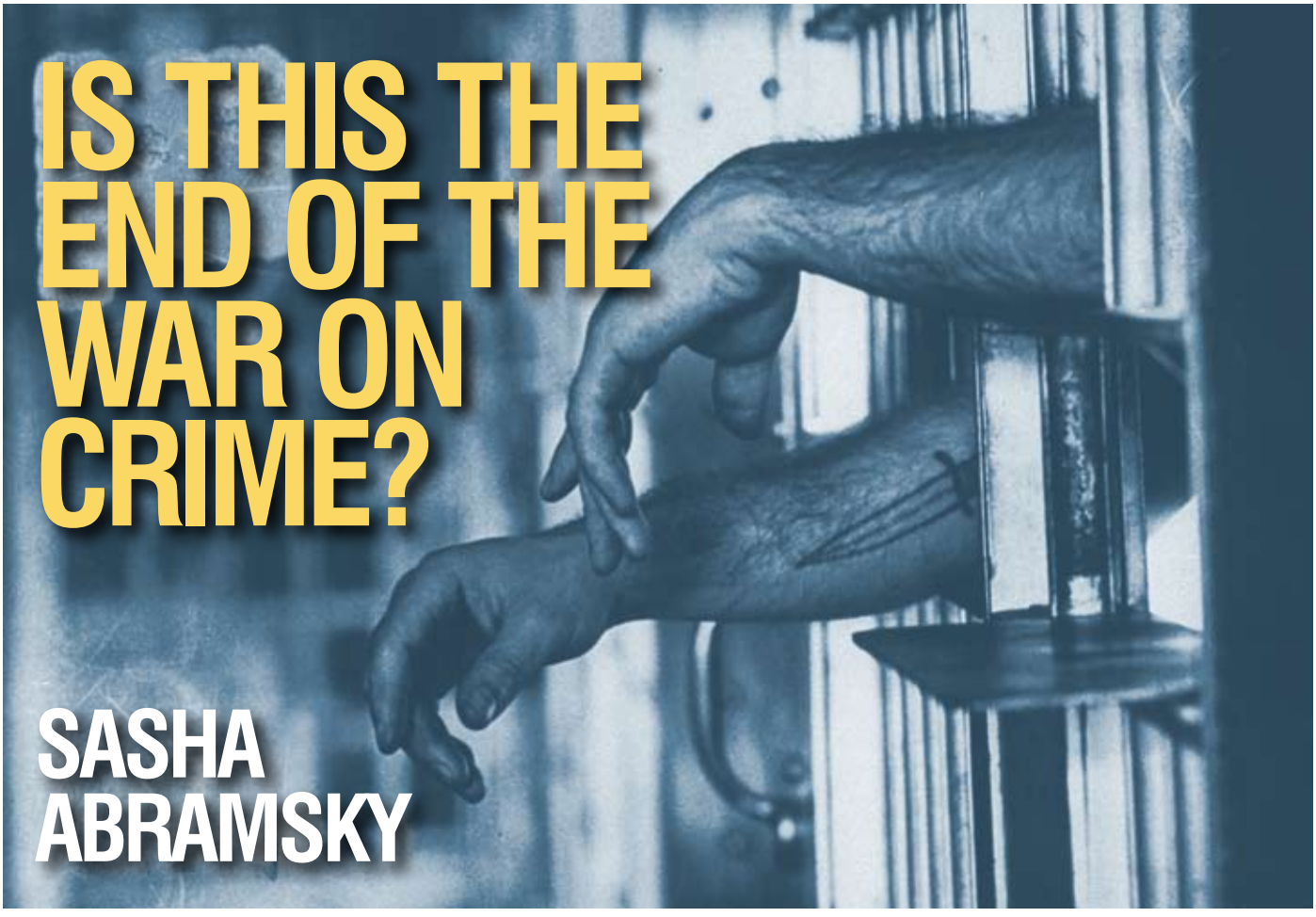
IS THIS THE END OF THE WAR ON CRIME?



SASHA ABRAMSKY

"Necessity," says Lorenzo Jones, executive director of the Connecticut-based A Better Way Foundation, "is the mother of invention." Jones, who has spent his adult life swimming against monster currents in his efforts to reform the country's criminal justice system, pauses to chuckle deeply at his own cliché. When it comes to drug policy, he continues, think of the present moment "as moving from a war economy to a postwar economy."

For decades, progressive policy analysts and criminal justice reformers such as Jones have argued that state and federal antidrug and, more generally, "tough on crime" incarceration strategies were counterproductive: that they were dramatically reshaping American society, at a staggering fiscal and moral cost, and they weren't succeeding. Drug use remained commonplace, and high recidivism numbers for paroled prisoners suggested that prisons weren't remolding criminals into model citizens. Far better, they argued, to keep prisons as a last resort for the truly hardened, violent criminals and to invest more resources in less expensive, and more effective, alternatives to incarceration.

True, crime rates have fallen dramatically since the early 1990s, in part because of those higher incarceration rates. But most experts believe they fell in larger part because of demographic shifts, changes in policing practices and an easing of the crack epidemic. The drop-off in crime has, in turn, finally allowed a public slightly less scared of crime to be slightly more willing to look for nuance rather than sound bites when it comes to policy. It has created what Bart Lubow, a juvenile justice advocate with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, terms an "ideological space" for discussions of reform. "The overall context regarding crime policy," he says, "is much less hysterical than it was through most of the 1990s."

Faced with a growing body of evidence that carefully tailored rehabilitation models can reduce recidivism or drug use better than jails and prisons, and with a burgeoning crisis in local and state government finances, politicians and voters alike are turning their backs on basic tough-on-crime staples. Instead, they are looking for inspiration to programs such as the HOPE Project in Hawaii, the High Point project in North Carolina and an experiment in Multnomah County (home to Portland, Oregon) to divert low-end probation and parole violators to nonincarcerative settings. All these model programs view jail and prison sentences as a last option rather than a default, and swift responses to violations are considered more important than harsh ones. For reformers, it is a rare breath of fresh air.

"I think the criminal justice system is more under the microscope because of the fiscal situation," explains Mike Thompson, director of the New York–based Council of State

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Government's Justice Center. "Every state's facing fiscal problems, with the exception of North Dakota, and when you look at items where expenditures have risen in the last twenty years, corrections jumps out at you."

Around the country, legislators are essentially asking how they can get more bang for the bucks they spend fighting crime, drug use, mental illness and so on. And they're willing to consult reformers they would have shunned in the recent past as irredeemably "soft" on crime. "Nobody can sit here and say things are fine," argues Jones. "Something has to give. Now we can sit at the table with people we couldn't previously work with and say, 'What are you willing to give?' We are literally writing this narrative as we go."

In Texas a $600 million prison-expansion plan was shelved in 2007 in favor of a $241 million plan expanding community-based drug and alcohol treatment services, after researchers convinced legislators that the latter would lower crime rates more than expanding the state's penal infrastructure. As a result, the notoriously prison-tough Lone Star State, whose leaders used to boast about its extraordinarily high incarceration rate, is implementing some of the country's most innovative reforms, creating a network of in-prison and post-prison residential drug treatment and DWI centers, mental health facilities, halfway houses for inmates being released onto parole, and nonjail residential settings for low-end parole violators. In 2009 the state's prison population declined, perhaps signaling the start of a reversal of nearly four decades of expansion, which saw the Lone Star State's prison numbers grow from just shy of 16,000 in 1972 to more than 170,000 in 2008. Texas joined twenty-five other states that saw reductions in the size of their inmate population last year.

In Kansas legislators approved a large investment in drug treatment programs and services for parolees designed to stop so many offenders from simply cycling back into prison after their release. The result was a drop in Kansas's prison population significant enough to allow the state to close several facilities.

Michigan recently reformed its prisoner-release process to allow for shorter sentences, winning accolades from the ACLU in the process. The state closed eight prisons as a result and invested some of the $250 million savings expected to be generated over a five-year period in an expanded network of mental health and job training services, as well as drug treatment programs.

All told, ten states have embraced "justice reinvestment" strategies such as this, reducing prison spending, investing a portion of the savings in more effective anticrime infrastructure and using the remainder of the savings to plug gaps elsewhere in their budgets. As this model spreads, says Thompson optimistically, we'll get more results-oriented policy-making than we've had in the past. "These are bipartisan, data-driven approaches: figure out what's driving the [prison population] growth and what can be done differently."

Even states that haven't formally adopted such a reinvestment strategy are, of necessity, being pushed in this direction. In California, home to the country's largest state prison population as well as the country's most dysfunctional state budget process, the combination of federal injunctions against overcrowding and the worst fiscal crunch since the Great Depression has brought the race to incarcerate of the past quarter-century to an end. Over the next several years, to the dismay of politicians who have built careers on being tough on crime, the prison population, which stands at around 170,000, will be reduced by several tens of thousands, with more emphasis on parole, probation and local drug treatment.

Around the country, legislators are adopting cost-saving reforms they would have shunned in the past as irredeemably 'soft' on crime.

New Mexico recently enacted a law banning employers from asking job applicants if they have a felony record. An increasing number of states, including conservative bastions like Alabama and Louisiana, are restructuring their juvenile justice systems to move away from incarceration. Drug and mental health courts are channeling more offenders into structured treatment. And many states are rolling back their most restrictive truth-in-sentencing provisions, allowing low-level offenders to return to their communities after serving only a small percentage of their sentences behind bars.

Some states and localities are also starting to invest in restorative justice models, putting offenders to work to repair the damage they caused the community rather than simply warehousing them in prisons.

Father George Horan, co-director of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles's Office of Restorative Justice, has spent a lifetime watching youngsters do stupid things and, as a result, ruin their lives. He has seen generations of kids graduate from being troubled children to hardened prisoners. And he has grown increasingly cynical about the ability of penal institutions to solve ingrained social problems. Far better, he has come to believe, to sit nonviolent offenders down with their families, teachers, peers, even victims, and force them to come to terms with the consequences of their actions.

Horan, 64, has a ruddy complexion and dresses casually. From his small office in the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Lincoln Heights, a bleak industrial area of Los Angeles just north of downtown, he works to help delinquent teens, many of them gang members, establish more productive bonds with their communities. When three teens broke into their school a few years back and trashed it, the Office of Restorative Justice

Sasha Abramsky writes regularly for The Nation. *His most recent books are* Breadline USA: The Hidden Scandal of American Hunger and How to Fix It *and* Inside Obama's Brain. *He lives in Sacramento.*

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persuaded the trial judge to consider a restorative justice solution. The kids had to face their principal and fellow students; they had to pay for the damage; and they had to spend their weekends doing community service at the school—cleaning classrooms, doing basic maintenance work, sweeping autumn leaves. The principal, recalls Horan, took the kids out to lunch, got to know them and encouraged them to attend to their studies. "She said the next year they were the three best kids in the school. What a better result than sending the kids to juvenile hall. They turned their lives around."

Horan is aware of the limitations of this strategy—he tried the same approach when three boys set fire to his church door, but this time the prosecutor insisted on seeking prison terms. Politically, he says, it would be next to impossible for prosecutors to embrace restorative justice for violent criminals. But Horan believes restorative justice models have to play a part in any revamping of America's criminal justice system. "Always, the first step is, the person has to take responsibility for what they did. That's the cornerstone," he explains. "What can a person do to heal the victim and heal the community?"

The 'war on drugs,' which Obama denounced as an utter failure during his presidential campaign, is showing the fragility of old age.

Meanwhile, extending the first-do-no-harm principles of the restorative justice movement, a growing number of politicians have started to identify sky-high African-American incarceration rates as a civil rights issue that, in tandem with high crime rates in poor communities, serves up a double whammy to already devastated neighborhoods. As a result, they have begun pushing legislation that characterizes the disproportionate incarceration of African-Americans as a problem. Connecticut recently passed a "racial impact statement" law mandating all major legislative proposals for the criminal justice system be studied for their racial impact. Other states, looking for ways to preserve public safety without inflicting the kind of collateral damage on communities that mass incarceration unleashes, will likely follow suit.

No part of the criminal justice system has had more of a racially skewed impact than America's antidrug strategy. Over the decades, millions of young Americans, mainly poor and disproportionately black and brown, have been arrested, prosecuted and sentenced to jail or prison for their involvement with the drug trade. It has been a staggering exercise in futility.

Yet these days, the "war on drugs," which Barack Obama denounced as an utter failure during his presidential campaign, is showing the fragility of old age. At the urging of the Obama administration and top Justice Department officials, Congress is working to eliminate the infamous crack and powder-cocaine sentencing disparities. And over the next few years, the Justice Department's Task Force on Sentencing Reform will likely recommend more proportionate sentencing for many drug offenses.

The era of "Lock 'em up and throw away the key" seems, slowly, to be drawing to a close. And over the next few decades, that will likely have the effect of gradually drawing down the size of the bloated prison population. Even seasoned conservative voices are cognizant of the winds of change.

"My attitude has always been, speed and certainty are crucial aspects of running a criminal justice system, not length of sentence," argues James Q. Wilson, at one time the country's most influential conservative criminologist. "Many sentences could be shortened without endangering public safety." Wilson, who rose to intellectual fame as President Nixon's favorite sociologist and later became known as the philosophical father of the Broken Windows policing theory, doesn't regret his role in developing ideas that helped contribute to America's mass incarceration experiment. But he also doesn't think that mass incarceration is, or should be, an end in itself. If there are alternatives that have at least as powerful an effect on reducing the crime rate, Wilson, an empiricist, believes they should be tried. Parole and probation systems should be reformed, he argues, so that violators are dealt with quickly and minor violators, such as those who fail a urine drug test, receive "a swift but very short penalty—a weekend in jail, a week in jail. It need not be returning people to serve a full prison term."

Changes in drug policy don't stop with shortening sentences, however. The administration recently lifted the ban on federal funding for needle-exchange programs—long a bugbear of drug-treatment and public health professionals. And for the first time since the 1970s, marijuana legalization movements are gaining traction at the state level. Californians will vote in November on a ballot measure to legalize pot, and preliminary polling indicates it could well pass. The initiative is buttressed by a number of politicians, like Assemblyman Tom Ammiano and State Senator Mark Leno, who have argued that legalizing marijuana would allow California to tax the lucrative market. Other states could follow in California's wake.

"People are now making a lawful income from cannabis here in California and other states," argues 57-year-old Chris Conrad, of the marijuana-advocacy newspaper *West Coast Leaf*, at a hummus-and-wine soiree to celebrate the opening of the Drug Policy Alliance's swank new downtown San Francisco offices. Conrad is talking about how the medical marijuana industry is increasingly using its clout to push for broader, across-the-board rollbacks of pot prohibition. "They can put that money back to invest in change. The idea is, it should be brought under control and tax revenue brought in. The whole financial argument is only going to get better. I think the drug war is fatally flawed, and it's doomed. It's just a matter of time; it could be five years, it could be twenty years. But prohibition doesn't work. It creates crime; it doesn't solve crime."

A few years ago Conrad would have been a countercultural refugee on the hippie fringe; these days, he and his ideas are increasingly mainstream. In fact, the attendees at the party oozed their radical-chic credentials; they were lawyers, doctors, politicians, consultants, businessmen. "The trend is for people to regulate rather than prohibit," asserted Doug Linney,

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the well-coiffed, sharp-dressed campaign consultant for the legalization initiative. "They see the current drug wars aren't working, especially regarding marijuana. There's an interest in changing it, especially because of the state's finances."

Cumulatively, all of these changes are bearing significant fruit. For the first time since the Nixon era, America's prison population is shrinking. In 2008, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the prison population fell in twenty states; in 2009 it fell in twenty-six states; and that trend is likely to continue in 2010. Moreover, as the number of drug-related sentences has declined slightly, so too has the appallingly high African-American incarceration rate edged slightly downward, off 9 percent from its peak a few years back. The gears of what journalist Joel Dyer, in the 1990s, tellingly labeled a "perpetual prisoner machine"—a self-sustaining interaction of conservative criminal justice lobbies, political opportunism, popular tough-on-crime sentiments, the economic needs of depressed prison towns and media sensationalism—seem finally to have gotten gummed up. Ironically, the federal government, which did so much to shift the country in a more conservative criminal justice direction for nearly fifty years, seems quite content to let the gears stay locked.

Most decisions about the criminal justice system are made at the state level. Despite the near-tenfold growth in the population of federal prison inmates since 1980, less than 10 percent of all inmates are serving federal sentences. But the federal government does perform some vital roles: it allocates resources directly (by, for example, patrolling the border and exporting the "war on drugs") and indirectly (by granting money to localities and states to set up antidrug task forces, funding drug and mental health treatment services, and putting more police on the streets). It creates overarching legal parameters within which states must operate (federal drug laws supersede state ones, which means that if California legalizes marijuana, for example, theoretically it would be setting up a conflict with DC). Perhaps most important, the federal government sets the tone for national conversations on crime and delinquency.

When it comes to tone-setting, sometimes what isn't said by federal officials is as important as what is. Over the past couple of years, President Obama's drug czar, ex–Seattle police chief Gil Kerlikowske, has chosen not to follow his predecessors with regard to medical marijuana. Whereas John Walters, Bush's drug czar, testified across the country against state medical marijuana laws, Kerlikowske has stayed silent. The effect, says Drug Policy Alliance executive director Ethan Nadelmann, has been to send a "green light to the states that they could have the freedom to go their own way on this." Kerlikowske, Attorney General Eric Holder and President Obama himself steer clear of talking about the "war on drugs," and they generally don't use sound bites to trumpet their "tough" credentials when it comes to tackling the complex problem of crime.

But what *is* being said is also fascinating. "Too many of our citizens have come to have doubts about our criminal justice system," Holder told a Congressional Black Caucus symposium on June 24, 2009. "We must be honest with each other and have the courage to ask difficult questions of ourselves and our system. We must break out of the old and tired partisan stances that have stood in the way of needed progress and reform. We have a moment in time that must be seized in order to ensure that all of our citizens are treated in a way that is consistent with the ideals embodied in our founding documents. This Department of Justice is prepared to act."

Indeed, in a series of key speeches over the past year, Holder has delivered a commitment, unprecedented in recent decades, to use the might of the Justice Department to ensure a fairer, less coercive criminal justice system. Addressing the NAACP in July 2009, the attorney general talked of the devastating harm that harsh drug sentences have caused in poor communities. "It is not justice," he declared, "to continue our adherence to a sentencing scheme that disproportionately affects some Americans, and some communities, more severely than others."

The previous week, he told an audience at the Vera Institute of Justice, a New York–based think tank, that "getting smart on crime requires talking honestly about which policies have worked and which have not, without fear of being labeled as too hard or, more likely, too soft on crime. Getting smart on crime means moving beyond useless labels and instead embracing science and data, and relying on them to shape policy. And it means thinking about crime in context—not just reacting to the criminal act but developing the government's ability to enhance public safety before the crime is committed and after the former offender is returned to society." Taking their cue from Holder, a slew of top officials have begun revamping the language they use to discuss crime and punishment.

> 'It is not justice to continue our adherence to a sentencing scheme that disproportionately affects some Americans.' —Eric Holder

As Kerlikowske explained to *The Nation* in March, shortly after he returned from a UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs meeting in Vienna, the country should not continue to think of drugs merely as a public safety problem but should start to see them as a public health problem. "My colleagues, I never heard them talk of a war on drugs," he said. "I've heard elected officials talk about it, but not police chiefs, sheriffs or prosecutors. They talk about it with the complexity the problem deserves."

In reshaping the national discourse on drugs, Kerlikowske touts his law enforcement credentials. He's a tough guy, a strong policeman with thirty-seven years on the job, and he knows he commands respect. "For me, it's a little bit like Nixon going to China," he explains. Kerlikowske has "very little concern about being labeled soft on drugs." And so he wants to talk about being "smart on drugs," instead of merely "tough." In fact, when he explains his mandate, the country's drug czar is more comfortable using the language of public health professionals than political posturers. "The 'war on drugs' was a simplistic answer to this really complex problem," he says. "We have to look at talking about addiction as a disease rather than

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a moral failure or saying people should just stop using drugs."

For the first time in more than forty years, criminal justice trends are starting to move in a sensible direction. At the local and state levels, fiscal necessity is forcing a rethink when it comes to incarceration strategies. And at the federal level, the politics that allowed George H.W. Bush to batter Michael Dukakis with images of Willie Horton, Bill Clinton to sign an execution warrant on the brain-damaged Ricky Ray Rector and George W. Bush to push glibly for more teens to be tried and sentenced as adults is taking a back seat to smart, holistic thinking.

"Everyone I talk to around the country has been affected by drugs," Kerlikowske says. "But it's not talked about the same way as if you had a member of your family having cancer—or even alcoholism. When I look at the drug problem, what it costs in healthcare costs, police-community relations, the Southwest border, foreign relations—every one of those things, drugs are a part. If we could recognize how inextricably linked to all of these issues drug consumption and addiction is, if we could work to address it with the complexity it deserves, that would make more sense than holding a press conference and showing a ton of cocaine or five people led out in handcuffs."

Of all the changes in tone brought about by Obama's election, in the long run few will be more significant to the country's well-being than those around criminal justice and drugs. Without a whole lot of fanfare, the administration is laying the foundations for a new criminal justice system model that might, conceivably, end America's morally disastrous, fiscally ruinous, four-decade-long experimentation with mass incarceration. ■

Against Boycott and Divestment

Punishing Israel's most progressive elements will not help to end the occupation.

by BERNARD AVISHAI

Insanity, they say, is doing the same thing and expecting a different result. Actually, that is just scientific irrationality. In human affairs, alas, insanity is doing the same thing and expecting the same result. A case in point is the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel, which—considering what happened at the University of California, Berkeley, in late April, and off the Gaza coast in late May—will be coming soon to a campus near you.

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If you missed it, Berkeley's student senate passed a BDS resolution against Israel, targeting General Electric and United Technologies, which presumably support Israel's occupation force. The student president vetoed the resolution. The senate then failed to override it, but the vote was thirteen to five in favor, with one abstention. The reports I've read of the debate suggest people falling into a familiar pattern: professors, students, union activists, etc. torturing logic to depict Israel's faults—which are serious enough to be unique—as "apartheid," while rehearsing the principles of action that arguably worked against South Africa a generation ago.

I say "arguably" because some of apartheid's most courageous critics, who helped to bring about an end to white rule, were opposed to B and D, even when they cautiously favored S. In 1987, when I was an editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, I interviewed Tony Bloom, CEO of the South African food processing giant Premier Group. Early on, Bloom rejected apartheid's foundations, and his company hired political detainees after they were released from prison. He had been among the small group of white business leaders who risked all in 1985 to meet with ANC leaders in Zambia—a great turning point. He befriended future South African President Thabo Mbeki and worked to support the transition to democracy. Though he eventually moved to London, he continued to transform his conglomerate into a model postapartheid firm.

What Bloom told me in 1987 was that, yes, foreign government sanctions on South African trade made sense in certain cases. But the boycott of South African universities and business people, and especially divestment campaigns against international companies doing business in the country, were seriously counterproductive. Why? Because those actions generally undermined the very people who advanced cosmopolitan values in the country. To get social change, you need social champions, in management as in universities.

Corporations like GM, Daimler and IBM did profit from the apartheid era, in the sense that they made the cars, trucks and computers South Africa needed and made enough profit to stay in business. But by this standard, tenured professors of democratic philosophy at Witwatersrand profited, too. The point is, great corporations, like great universities, are teaching institutions. Bloom thought foreign, technology-heavy corporations were especially important breakers of apartheid taboos, bringing what might be called scientific doubt—not to mention international management protocols opposed to racism and bigotry, like the Sullivan Principles. Their managers were Bloom's elite allies; had they been forced to pull out by their shareholders, it would have been a disaster for him and others devoted to reform.

This, I hasten to add, was a regime whose original wealth was almost entirely extractive, built on the labor of black Africans

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in mining and farming, and an economy whose trade was still largely in diamonds, minerals and produce. Sanctioning South African trade meant distressing, mostly, mine and plantation owners who profited directly from the old exploitation. There was a common political language, English, and despite strong local ethnicities and tongues (Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, etc.) a perversely unified culture divided by class and race. Yet people like Bloom personified a growing urban industrial sector (mainly with British roots) that needed global technological culture, financial services and commercial know-how. The entrenched security state seemed to him a throwback to naked colonialism, defending a more retrograde capitalism and a huge (largely Afrikaner) public sector. Even under apartheid, that is, you had enlightened people who needed the world's backing, and B and D cut the ground out from under them. In contrast, Bloom thought, state officials might be shunned. Segregated sports teams might be shunned. South Africa might be kept out of regional free-trade agreements, so the economy as a whole might be seen by the public as promising and yet held back by racism.

The idea that precipitating Israeli economic collapse will somehow hasten a democratic outcome is like blockading Gaza to sink Hamas.

Which brings us to Israel today. Some Israeli democrats and peace activists welcome the BDS trend, if reluctantly. They argue what seems plausible, that the only way to influence the Israeli government (and the Israeli right more generally) to end the occupation is through mounting outside pressure. And, true enough, the Israeli state apparatus persists in according semi-official status to various institutions—the Jewish Agency and Jewish National Fund, the Orthodox rabbinate—that privilege J-positive blood. The warped legal frame accommodating these institutions, from the administration of national lands to the "status quo" agreement banning interfaith marriages, valorize a settlement mystique, a tribal conception of Jewish identity and a cult of Jerusalem; the groups resisting democratic reform of the state are, unsurprisingly, the same that support Greater Israel. (I argued all these points in my book *The Tragedy of Zionism* in 1985—hence, my interest in Bloom.)

Nevertheless, is Israel really like apartheid South Africa? No. The Israeli economy does not depend on Arab labor—and never did. (From 1967 to the 1990s, it is true, Israelis did employ tens of thousands of Palestinians in construction and agriculture; but these proved marginal industries, and foreign workers eventually replaced them with little dislocation.) What, if not residual colonialism, accounts for residual discrimination? Tragically, the very institutions that make Israel discriminatory today consolidated their power during the 1920s and '30s, under the British Mandate, and were meant to cultivate autonomous "Hebrew labor" and economic self-sufficiency separate from the Arab feudal culture. The idea, then, was a revolutionary, secular Hebrew culture (which is why most Diaspora rabbis thought Zionists to be apostates). This separatism led to the globalized Hebrew republic in greater Tel Aviv, a civil society that's become a greenhouse for technology start-ups as independent of labor-intensive industry as Silicon Valley. Economically, the ideal solution for Israeli entrepreneurs would be to saw Tel Aviv and the coastal plain off Eurasia and float it out toward Cyprus. The internal rival to Greater Israel is Global Israel.

And, not coincidentally, Israelis and Palestinians can hardly be thought of as antagonistic classes in a common political economy. Rather, they both cherish linguistic and other cultural distinctions they want to protect—distinctions that morph into inflamed nationalisms and "religious war" when people on either side of the Green Line feel backed against the wall. Finally—despite institutionalized discrimination and the disquieting excesses of its security apparatus—the Israeli state still accords its citizens, including about 1.5 million Arabs, a functioning democracy, the right to vote, a free press and an independent judiciary. Democratic Israel is under threat from growing numbers of rightists for whom settling "Eretz Yisrael" is of a piece with containing, if not disenfranchising, Israeli Arabs and Jewish dissenters skeptical of their version of the Jewish state. But, then, how to strengthen dissent? By isolating dissenters?

People who advocate for boycott and divestment often slide over these matters. They may say they are modestly trying to pressure Israeli elites into ending the occupation. But take the Berkeley initiative to scale and add in the boycott of Israeli universities, recently proposed in England's academic union. How would cutting off the most progressive forces in Israel from global corporations and international scholarly events accomplish this? Even generalized trade sanctions, like keeping Israel out of the OECD (which, in fact, it recently joined), would have mainly impaired Israel's estimated $25 billion in high-tech exports, not extractive, postcolonial industries, as in South Africa. Polls show that about 40 percent of Israeli Jews have abidingly secular and globalist (if not liberal) attitudes. Who gains from economic decline and the inevitable consequence of most educated Israelis fleeing to, well, the Bay Area? Wouldn't the rightists, also about 40 percent, be most satisfied to see Israel become a little Jewish Pakistan?

Besides, divestment on the Berkeley model assumes the capacity to identify companies specifically supporting occupation activities. But Israel's networked economy makes this virtually impossible. Is United Technologies bad because one division, Sikorsky, makes Israeli attack helicopters—or is it good because another division, Carrier, makes Palestinian air conditioners? And what about GE CAT scans? For that matter, what about the Samsung cellphone the attack helicopter pilot may be carrying, or the Android software on the cellphone? OK, some will respond, just make the boycott more general. But the idea that precipitating Israeli economic collapse will somehow hasten a democratic outcome is like smacking a TV to fix the picture. Come to think of it, it is like blockading Gaza to sink Hamas.

My impression from various encounters with advocates for B and D is that they are simply unable to imagine that the

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David M. Bressoud is the DeWitt Wallace Professor of Mathematics in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science at Macalester College, where he has also served as Chair of the department. He earned his Master's and Ph.D. in Mathematics from Temple University.

A former Fulbright Fellow and Sloan Foundation Fellow, Professor Bressoud has served as Visiting Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study and the Mathematical Association of America's Pólya Lecturer, and has received the Mathematical Association of America's Allegheny Mountain Section Distinguished Teaching Award.

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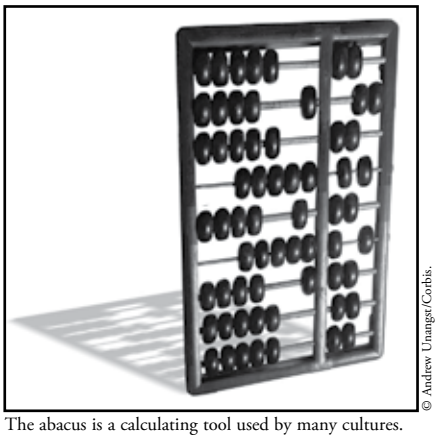

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The abacus is a calculating tool used by many cultures.

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post-1967 Israel, an Israel of occupation, is not the only possible one. They take for granted that all Israelis are colluding in an immoral, outdated structure—that, QED, a "Jewish state" must mean racist privileges for Jews. They imply, but will not just say, that the two-state solution is an illusion and that Palestine is bound to become a bantustan; that we are on the path to a binational state, one person, one vote, in the whole of historic Palestine—and that punishing Israeli globalization will hasten its arrival. (Presumably, as in South Africa, the citizens of this new state will all speak an exotically accented English.)

But what seems far more likely than a binational state, given the irredentist instincts of the Israeli right and the precedent of violent "steadfastness" of Palestinians (reinforced by the Islamist trend gripping many Palestinian young people), is a kind of Bosnian war. It could start tomorrow with, say, a riot among increasingly impoverished Jerusalem Arabs and spread like wildfire across the West Bank and Israeli Arab towns of the Triangle region. How will B and D do anything but make all Israelis feel demonized and prone to apocalyptic thinking and ethnic cleansing? Already, polls suggest that the Israeli center, which is skeptical of the settlers, feels "the West" does not appreciate what it is like to live with suicide bombers and missile attacks.

Targeted sanctions against the occupation are another matter, however. Foreign governments might well ban consumer products like fruit, flowers and Dead Sea mineral creams and shampoos produced by Israelis in occupied territory, much as Palestinian retail stores do. The EU already requires Israel to distinguish products this way. If Israel continues building in East Jerusalem, and the UN Security Council majority sanctions Israeli tourism, the US government might well choose not to veto the resolution. The Pentagon might sanction, say, Israel Aerospace Industries if, owing to continued settlement, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations break down. Any US sanctions would dominate Israeli headlines for weeks. These would not much hurt the economy directly but would gesture toward the larger truth Israeli managers understand in their bones, namely, that an advanced, networked economy is built as much on expanding relationships with global companies as algorithms, and political isolation will naturally lead to economic isolation.

Israelis, indeed, must be made to choose between Global Israel and Greater Israel, but you do not automatically hurt the latter by wrecking the former. Sanction the Israeli government for activities that obstruct peacemaking. Hurt the settlements. But boycott and divest from the private sector, and you may create an economic implosion. Israel's ratio of debt to GDP looks eerily like that of the weakest EU economies. Unlike Greece, Israel has a rising class of cosmopolitan entrepreneurs who have been politically complacent, especially during the second intifada and Bush administration. But only they can lead the country out of political crisis—and only if they can hold on to their prestige, which is itself rooted in international commerce. This prestige, after all, is what diplomatic "engagement" aims to achieve—does it not? We want the soft power of global markets to encourage the formation of more worldly business and professional classes everywhere, from Russia to Syria. Isn't that why we invest such hope in Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad? We said Bush, Cheney and Rice were wrong to boycott whole countries. They were. ■

The SEIU Andy Stern Leaves Behind

His single-minded pursuit of growth alienated allies. Did it produce the gains he promised?

by MAX FRASER

By the time Andy Stern resigned from his post as president of the country's second-largest union, in May, he had established himself as the most influential and controversial labor leader of his generation. When he took over the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in 1996, with the labor movement still mired in a decades-long decline, Stern quickly made renewing labor's commitment to growth the refrain of his presidency. He called on the rest of the labor movement to abandon a status quo that was no longer working, and he insisted that unless unions figured out new ways to organize the tens of millions of nonunion workers and create a "modern, pro-growth, dynamic, progressive, problem-solving labor movement," they were doomed to obsolescence.

"When our leadership team came into office," Stern reflected in early May, "we took over a good union and made it into the largest voice for workers in the country. We became the most effective grassroots political organization around." As SEIU's stock rose, so did Stern's. Prominent liberals from Howard Dean to George Soros hailed his "bold vision for reform," while the *Wall Street Journal* and the Chamber of Commerce praised him as a "new" kind of labor leader that business could work with. And after SEIU moved mountains to elect Barack Obama in 2008, Stern became one of Obama's closest confidants outside government—a throwback to the days when union presidents doubled as labor statesmen on the national stage.

Much ink has been spilled, including in this magazine, on the internal disputes that racked the union under Stern's tenure [see Peter Dreier, "Divorce—Union Style," August 31, 2009, and Esther Kaplan, "Labor's Growing Pains," June 16, 2008, among others]. And surely the rancor he leaves behind is part of his legacy—as one senior union official bluntly put it, "Andy Stern leaves pretty much without a friend in the labor movement." But for Stern, who dismisses his critics as zealots and traditionalists, the more important question is whether

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he has realized his early promises of revitalizing the union's organizing mission.

On the face of it, the numbers are impressive: between 1996 and today, SEIU added more than 1 million members, "the largest growth of strength in any union, in any decade in the history of the labor movement," as Stern boasted at the union's most recent convention. But SEIU's recent accomplishments are far more ambiguous than they would initially seem. As growth became his all-consuming passion, Stern came to rely heavily on back-room deals with employers and other shortcuts, perpetuating an illusion of robust growth that has obscured SEIU's failure to devise a viable long-term strategy for reversing labor's decline. Along the way, Stern's go-it-alone leadership style alienated rank-and-file members and isolated the union from former allies. "Stern understood that labor had to grow or die, that union density is a vital part of making the trade union movement an effective economic and political bargainer," says Nelson Lichtenstein, a labor historian at the University of California, Santa Barbara. "But density is not the only thing, because unions today are essentially political organizations which succeed by mobilizing their membership and animating their allies. Numbers are less important than élan. Andy Stern lost sight of that."

No moment better signified the polarizing effects of Stern's single-minded pursuit of growth than when he and SEIU led a group of five unions out of the AFL-CIO in 2005 and into a new federation, Change to Win, full of promises to substantially increase the resources the labor movement was devoting to organizing new workers. The split, Stern says, was about creating "a federation that was focused on using every weapon at its disposal to grow larger, not smaller." As it turned out, the break did not produce any such explosion of new organizing, and in retrospect, to his critics, it was just the kind of uncompromising and ill-considered move that typified his tenure at SEIU.

Drawn to unorthodox ideas—like collaborating with the notoriously antiunion Wal-Mart to push for healthcare reform—Stern frequently forged tactical partnerships with corporate America that made other unionists uneasy. In the late 1990s and early 2000s the union began to embrace new strategies to meet Stern's bold growth targets, seeking deals with large employers in which they would agree to remain neutral in unionization drives in exchange for a quid pro quo from the union. In some cases, this involved the union's collaborating with nursing home operators to improve patient care or lobby statehouses for increased Medicare payments. In others it meant ceding the union's ability to strike; or providing national hospital chains with economic relief in the form of substandard wages and benefits; or agreeing to organize certain subcontractor facilities but not others, even if workers there wanted to join SEIU. In a number of instances the more debatable aspects of these agreements were hammered out at the highest levels of the union, with little or no direct involvement on the part of the workers.

Cornell University's Kate Bronfenbrenner has studied these "employer neutrality" deals extensively, and notes that SEIU is not the only union to use them to grow. "The question is not whether you are using neutrality agreements; it's about what you give up to get them and how you go about using them," she says. "If you want to have a lasting union afterward, you have to involve the members. Unions are most likely to win any kind of organizing campaign when they combine top-down leverage with bottom-up organizing. SEIU has had some very effective agreements with employers that have combined the two approaches, but in recent years they started to back off from the bottom-up approach."

By 2007 doubts began to emerge inside SEIU about the transparency and strategic effectiveness of these arrangements with employers. The most vocal came from Sal Rosselli—the

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leader of a large, Oakland-based local, United Healthcare Workers West—who entered into a take-no-prisoners battle with Stern and the national union that quickly went public. UHW had been involved in a number of such agreements with nursing homes and hospitals in California, and in Rosselli's eyes the sacrifices involved had come to outweigh the benefits for the union. "This transactional exchange of members' rights and standards for greater numbers contradicts the core mission of SEIU," he charged in a February 2008 resignation letter to the union's executive committee. "An overly zealous focus on growth—growth at any cost, apparently," was distorting the promise of Stern's ambitious agenda and leaving workers with little control over their union, he argued. Despite considerable support for Rosselli's position inside and out of the union, Stern put the local under trusteeship in 2009. Rosselli and the UHW leadership in turn defected from SEIU and formed a rival union, the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW).

Also controversial was SEIU's pursuit of growth through strategic mergers. Sometimes these marriages were entered into willingly, like the 1998 melding of New York City's

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120,000-member healthcare union, Local 1199, with SEIU. But when SEIU couldn't make these mergers happen peaceably, it often resorted to more predatory tactics. Between 2002 and 2009, SEIU led what amounted to a series of hostile takeover campaigns against smaller unions in the service sector, pushing members to switch their affiliation to SEIU and in some cases filing decertification measures against rival unions. SEIU wasn't always successful, but a pattern of behavior was clearly being established.

"SEIU became an acquisition machine," says John Wilhelm, president of UNITE HERE, which has been locked in a battle with SEIU over members and financial assets for the past year. When an earlier merger between UNITE and HERE began to fall apart in 2008, Stern initially invited the whole union to merge with SEIU; but then, when that idea fell flat, he encouraged the UNITE side to split off and join SEIU under the guise of a new grouping called Workers United. Stern argues that it makes strategic sense for SEIU to represent workers in hotels and office buildings that are owned by the same firms that employ the union's janitors or security guards. But Wilhelm attributes Stern's involvement in another union's internal affairs to a naked grab for power and members, and accuses SEIU of trying to home in on HERE's traditional organizing jurisdictions while seizing a share of UNITE HERE's substantial financial assets. SEIU has spent the past year mounting decertification campaigns in UNITE HERE–represented hotels and casinos in Puerto Rico, San Antonio, Philadelphia, Toronto and elsewhere, earning the ire of a labor movement that historically has had little tolerance for such interunion raiding. At a meeting of the AFL-CIO executive council in March, even John Sweeney, the former AFL-CIO and SEIU president who brought Stern into the union some thirty years ago, described his onetime protégé's recent actions as "despicable."

Stern came to rely on back-room deals with employers and other organizing shortcuts that created an illusion of robust growth.

These ongoing fights have taken their toll on SEIU, draining millions of dollars from the union's operating budget and, by a number of accounts, leaving the union's staff increasingly frustrated with the leadership's priorities. They have also distracted attention from the fact that SEIU's actual organizing record never lived up to Stern's expectations. In SEIU's core private-sector jurisdictions of healthcare and property services, growth has been sluggish at best. Over the past ten years, SEIU added on average just 6,000 nursing home members annually, and in hospitals, as the union has acknowledged, "organizing didn't match industry growth" for much of that period. Even some of the more encouraging recent victories, like a 2006 campaign that brought union recognition to janitors in Houston and was hailed as a major breakthrough in the largely nonunion South, did not translate into the kind of membership gains the union had hoped for. By 2008 SEIU still represented less than 10 percent of hospital workers in the country, just under 11 percent of nursing home employees and less than 8 percent of the property services industry.

What headway SEIU did make during the Stern years came largely among public employees, particularly nurses and health aides in state-funded, home-based healthcare systems. By using its electoral clout to coax, cajole and bully governors and state legislators into granting collective bargaining rights to homecare workers or childcare providers, SEIU added hundreds of thousands of members over the past two decades, while expanding its footprint in low-membership states between the coasts like Wisconsin, Nevada and Missouri. Close to half of SEIU's organizing growth between 1996 and 2006 was a direct result of these kinds of political campaigns, and today homecare accounts for fully a quarter of SEIU's total membership.

But growth of this kind has depended to a great extent on the fiscal stability of SEIU's public sector employers, and as Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein point out in their forthcoming book on homecare workers and organized labor, "the current recession and the fiscal crisis of the states now expose the Achilles heel of welfare state political unionism." In California, for example, where SEIU has more homecare members than in any other state, Governor Schwarzenegger has included deep cuts to the state's homecare system as part of his latest budget proposal, and it's unclear whether the union will be able to find many other willing partners in state capitals in the years ahead.

Not only does a reliance on public sector growth make unions vulnerable to fiscal belt-tightening, but with five private sector workers for every one in the public sector, the labor movement needs a private sector base to retain any significant social relevance. And without its recent gains in the public sector, SEIU would be hard-pressed to uphold its status as the country's fastest-growing union. As Wilhelm argues, "SEIU's success in organizing public and quasi-public employees has created a mythology that has obscured the reality in the private sector, which is that they have failed." The collapse of the Employee Free Choice Act, which Stern poured more time and energy into than anyone else, dashed SEIU's best hope for resolving labor's continuing private sector organizing difficulties.

All told, SEIU today finds itself in a precarious situation. By 2009 the union was facing dire economic straits as it struggled under the rising costs of political campaigns, which were paying diminishing returns, and interunion wars, which had sapped its material reserves. The union spent much of Stern's final full year in office cutting back on expenditures wherever it could. The deepest cuts, ironically, were made to SEIU's representational expenses, which are associated with a union's organizing operations. By the end of the year, the union Stern had promised to turn into the engine of growth for a revitalized labor movement was spending less per member on representational costs than at any time since 2002. As Stern exits, SEIU is left with more questions than answers about how the labor movement can once again become a dynamic force in the political and economic life of the country.

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Stern's successor, Mary Kay Henry, in an interview days after the SEIU executive board named her the union's first female president, talked about how much work still remains undone since she joined the union in 1979. She was discussing a recent action at the Maryland headquarters of Sodexo, a subcontractor that provides on-site food, janitorial and other services for large employers like hospitals and universities. With 120,000 North American employees, Sodexo has been an important SEIU target for some years, and the union was in Gaithersburg in mid-April to protest the company's low wages, unpaid sick days and outright hostility to employees' efforts to form a union, which has included threats and even firings.

"It infuriates me that in 2010 we are still fighting for frickin' sick days," Henry fumed, showing some of the exasperation that comes from many years of fighting a losing battle. "It's a testament to how bad things have become. When I hear that nursing home workers are still bringing in towels from home to cut up to make their own washcloths—that's what they were doing in 1983, when I first started organizing nursing home workers! The promise of change with a union is great enough that these workers are willing to walk through fire to make it happen, and we just haven't done enough for them to change things."

How much of a change Henry represents remains to be seen. She promises to redouble the union's commitment to growth, especially among security guards, multiservice workers, and hospital and nursing home employees, while continuing to expand its presence in homecare and other public sector work. She talks about empowering rank-and-file members to play a larger role in the union's organizing program, and is setting aside $4 million for a research and development fund designed to nurture new ideas about how to fuel private sector organizing. She speaks highly of creative strategies like Local 1199's Heart of Baltimore campaign, which is using the Justice for Janitors model for organizing an entire industry in a single city—where one in five Baltimore jobs is in healthcare—rather than picking off employers one by one. This fall the union will send its member volunteers and other campaign resources to forty-four states, to beat back a Republican resurgence during the midterm elections and, in Henry's words, "be the drumbeat for working people during the economic crisis." And recognizing that it will be hard for SEIU to do all that on its own, she sounds committed to doing "everything we can" to settle the dispute with UNITE HERE (if not NUHW), and is otherwise eager to "restore our relationships with the rest of the American labor movement."

SEIU's critics remain unconvinced. They note that Henry has been part of Stern's inner circle for many years, as a union vice president, executive committee member and director of the union's healthcare division, and signed off on the more controversial decisions of Stern's presidency. NUHW's Rosselli spent thirty years working with Henry in SEIU's healthcare division, during which "there were times of absolute collaboration and then times of absolute betrayal," he says. In one case, a national bargaining team Henry oversaw during negotiations with the Tenet hospital chain in 2007 agreed to concessionary contract terms without clearing them with members in California, in what would become a critical point of contention in the ensuing

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battle between Rosselli's local and the national union. Henry disputes Rosselli's claim about the role she played in the Tenet bargaining, describing it as a temporary misunderstanding caused by a "rogue bargainer," which she quickly corrected. And for her part, Henry says she will consider "no settlement with Sal Rosselli that falls short of him pulling out of all elections" to win back his old members. But Rosselli has made it clear that he has no intention of doing so, and already nearly 4,300 members in eleven bargaining units have voted to leave SEIU for the breakaway union. In the next few weeks the two sides will fight what could be a decisive battle in the Kaiser Permanente system. SEIU has nearly 50,000 members in Kaiser—enough to make or break Rosselli's goal of becoming a viable challenger to SEIU in the California healthcare industry and eventually nationwide.

More generally, Henry has to decide the extent to which she is willing to acknowledge the failures of the Stern years and learn from them. For Wilhelm, who describes Stern as a "brilliant man of enormous ability," reckoning with the shortcomings of his approach to organizing is one of the key challenges facing Henry, SEIU and the rest of a labor movement still fighting for its very survival. "Andy got captured by the notion that by being part of the inner circle of discussions in Washington and rubbing shoulders with people with power that he himself was powerful," Wilhelm says. "I know that I have zero power if I'm disconnected from my members. And that's what happened to Andy—he couldn't have gotten more disconnected. That's the kiss of death."

With private sector union membership at 7 percent of the workforce and shrinking, the urgency of Stern's original call to arms to restore union growth has never been so great. But in his obsessive focus on increasing SEIU's ranks, Stern forgot the lessons of the last significant period of growth for American unions, during the birth of industrial unionism in the 1930s, when the shop-floor militancy of the great sit-down strikes electrified a movement of workers like never before. If such a movement is possible again today, it will require a more ambitious growth agenda than Stern ever envisioned—one of workers, by workers and for workers. ■

Exchange

(continued from page 2)

France) between 1780 and 1800 demonstrate that mostly (albeit not in America) they were led by tiny groups of unrepresentative intellectuals who became spokesmen by using radical ideology as an effective catch-all for expressing the burgeoning discontent of the era.

Finally, and again absurdly wrong, Moyn thinks the phase of the French Revolution dominated by the Jacobins was ideologically closer to the "*philosophique*" revolution of reason I am describing than the Revolution of 1788–92 and was less Rousseauist. Well, first, the evidence shows that the Robespierre phase was far more Rousseauist. Second, it was incontestably less *philosophique*.

Looking back later, Tom Paine, one of the giants of radical ideology, expressed it well: with the Jacobins the "principles of the Revolution, which philosophy had first diffused, had been departed from [and] philosophy rejected. The intolerant spirit of church persecution had transferred itself into politics; the tribunals, styled revolutionary, supplied the place of an Inquisition; and the guillotine of the stake." The freedoms of 1789 were explicitly rejected by Robespierre in several speeches.

There are bad reviews and bad reviews; but the worst are surely those that fail to give even the faintest clue what the book under review is arguing. Moyn speaks derisively of my being attacked by "so many gnats" that might seem more like vultures. I leave it to the reader to decide whether Moyn counts as a vulture or a gnat.

JONATHAN ISRAEL
Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

Moyn Replies

NEW YORK CITY

Jonathan Israel answers my demand for an account of non-Spinozist origins simply with a list of other philosophers, which surely misses the point. And then, as his letter reveals, he is tempted to measure their thought against the singular yardstick that Spinoza provided (Israel's books go much further in the same direction).

Israel complains that I don't address his new volume. Unfortunately, his invidious classification of the Enlightenment's different factions is his core preoccupation. As for his approach to the causes of the French Revolution, his letter—like his new book—mostly leaves room for improvement. Most troubling of all, Israel still does not seem able to fathom that the goal is not simply to congratulate past thinkers as "consistent" or dispense with them as useless—which would, in any case, be a philosophical judgment that Israel is not terribly qualified to make. Instead, these philosophers always provide funds of jostling contentions that did and could serve a wide variety of purposes, including ones that they did not imagine.

And while he rages against some criticisms I collected from others in my review, Israel completely omits the main worry I added for myself. Even were the evil of the Counter-Enlightenment extirpated, and a "moderate" Enlightenment successfully called out as treason in disguise, it would leave the most exciting reason to study the whole era still there: the Enlightenment's multiple possible versions, and therefore its continually problematic character, now and in the future.

It is this central feature of Enlightenment—however radical—that means that there are many issues on which the Enlightenment gives no clear answers. As my review stated, I admire Tom Paine too. But—like Spinoza—he is no messiah inspiring blind faith. As for a rhetorical inquisition, it won't help either.

SAMUEL MOYN

Clarification: It's a Book World

In "The Death and Life of the Book Review" (June 21), John Palattella writes that "*The Los Angeles Times Book Review* was launched as a twelve-page Sunday tabloid section in 1975. *The Washington Post Book World* debuted as a Sunday tabloid section in the 1960s; it was folded into the paper in the mid-1970s, only to be resurrected as a stand-alone publication in the early 1980s. (Neither exists today.)"

Although *Book World* no longer exists as a Sunday tabloid section, the *Post* prints daily book reviews under the Book World rubric, and produces themed tabloid books issues four times a year.

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Books & the Arts.

Ardor and the Abyss

by JAMES LONGENBACH

What makes a human being make a poem? Why does the language we employ every day—language suited equally as well to thank-you notes or parking tickets—ask to be liberated from its more workaday chores, its rhythmic vitality threatening to overpower its capacity for plain sense? Why do readers enjoy the feeling of being overpowered? We don't reread great novels or poems because we can't remember the story; we reread because we want to feel our familiar world becoming strange again.

A friend of your brother sends you a gift, a painting of Indian Pipes, which is your favorite flower. You write a thank-you note: "I know not how to thank you." Because your brother's wife is your closest friend, you have refused to meet the bearer of the gift: you know, as most people do not, that your brother's friend is in fact his mistress. You know this because their assignations have taken place in your own house, in the dining room, on a black horse-hair sofa in front of the fire. The assignations have been facilitated by your sister, with whom you share the house your grandfather built. Your brother, his wife and their three children live next door in a house your father built for them.

Another gift arrives: a yellow jug painted with red trumpet-vine flowers. You are being wooed by your brother's mistress, but unlike your sister, whose primary allegiance is to your brother, you remain steadfastly devoted to your brother's wife and children, from whom your brother has withdrawn his daily affection; there will be "no treason," you tell the oldest child. To the mistress you write a second note:

> Nature forgot—The Circus
> reminded her—
> Thanks for the Ethiopian Face.
> The Orient is in the West.
> "You knew, Oh Egypt" said the
> entangled Antony—

For all intents and purposes, this is a thank-you note, but because its language fails so aggressively to embody those intents and purposes, it feels like a poem. The writer does not mean merely to refer to the occasion at hand, the receipt of a gift, but to force the giver to attend to a new and more pressing occasion: the reality of the language itself. Does the writer mean to compare the giver to the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba, making herself King Solomon, recipient of the queen's gifts? Does she mean to compare the giver to Shakespeare's luxuriously two-faced Cleopatra? To a circus? The recipient of this thank-you note would be baffled, threatened or enraged by these provocative metaphors. The reader of this poem would be thrilled—not simply by the metaphors but by the speed with which one provocation is superseded by another.

"This is the only drama in Dickinson's life

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A daguerreotype of Emily Dickinson, circa 1847

Lives Like Loaded Guns
Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds.
By Lyndall Gordon.
Viking. 491 pp. $32.95.

James Longenbach's new book of poems, The Iron Key, *will be published by Norton this fall. He teaches at the University of Rochester.*

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that's not of her making," says Lyndall Gordon in *Lives Like Loaded Guns*, her account not only of the life but of the afterlife of Emily Dickinson, an afterlife that continues to be shaped to this day by the internecine warfare within her immediate family, their progeny and their associates. The writer of the thank-you notes is Dickinson, infamous recluse, the author of some 1,775 poems, almost all of which remained unpublished until after her death. The adulterers are Austin Dickinson, her brother, and Mabel Loomis Todd, who first laid eyes on Dickinson only when she was lying in her coffin but who became the first editor of Dickinson's poems. Austin's spurned wife is Susan Gilbert Dickinson, with whom Dickinson shared 276 of her poems, including many of her greatest.

"With the exception of Shakespeare," wrote Dickinson to Sue, "you have told me of more knowledge than any one living." Sue would eventually publish some of the poems in her possession, and her daughter Mattie would continue until her death in 1943 to exert her mother's right to do so. Until her death in 1968, Mabel Loomis Todd's daughter Millicent would exert her mother's right to do the same thing, a right that was perhaps unintentionally bequeathed to her by Dickinson's sister, Vinnie, who asked Mabel to transcribe the hundreds of poems found in Dickinson's bedroom after her death. Lies, vendettas and lawsuits proliferated: a drama of marital infidelity was played out over the dead poet's manuscripts with an intricacy that Henry James could not have imagined. The last major player in this drama, Mary Hampson (the wife of Mattie's companion, Alfred Leete Hampson), died in 1988. Until the end, she lived in the house that Dickinson's father built for Austin and Sue, the Evergreens, and the house has remained basically unchanged since the poet's lifetime. Dickinson last entered the Evergreens on the night of October 4, 1883, when she came to sit beside her dying nephew, Gib. Today, Gib's rocking horse still stands in a shroud of dust beside his bed.

When Gordon says that Austin's betrayal of Sue was "the only drama in Dickinson's life that's not of her making," she means to emphasize that Emily Dickinson was an extraordinarily powerful woman, an artist who was intimidated by nothing—the opposite of a fear-driven recluse, the opposite of the lovelorn spinster that some of her family members were driven to concoct for the world. The drama of her brother's marriage is familiar, but the Dickinson family happened to include among its members one of the most brilliant poets in the English language. Shakespeare, Blake—who else is as rivetingly inexplicable yet as charismatically inviting? The great virtue of Gordon's biography is that it makes Dickinson the person—sister, friend, seducer, adversary—seem as scary as her poems. The inevitable liability is that Dickinson the maker of poems remains as elusive to us as she was to the people who knew her best.

Gordon is the author of biographies of T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Brontë, Henry James and Mary Wollstonecraft—biographies that are distinguished by their sharpness of focus and economy of scale. Rather than competing for our attention with the author in question, Gordon tells the whole life by concentrating on what she judges to be the most potent aspect of it. For instance, her biography of Eliot is in essence an account of his relationships with four women (Emily Hale, Vivienne Haigh-Wood, Mary Trevelyan and Valerie Fletcher), two of whom he married, two of whom he spurned. A notoriously elusive poet emerges from Gordon's book as never before, reflected in the anguished lives of the women surrounding him.

The young Dickinson was so volcanic in her intuitions that she could clear a room.

Gordon's strategy in *Lives Like Loaded Guns* is similar. Most of the details of Dickinson's family life are well-known, but because Dickinson scholars (as well as the curators of her manuscripts and the publishers of her poems) have inevitably maintained relationships with one or another faction of the Dickinson family, the story has almost always been told in partisan terms. Neither has it been possible to imagine those factions themselves as the most revealing lens through which to imagine the daily life of a poet even more elusive than Eliot. The people to whom Dickinson was most closely related or most passionately attracted were rampant, larger-than-life figures, and as Gordon demonstrates, "Emily was not an oddity amongst them." More than that, her power dwarfed theirs. When Austin wanted to give his mistress a parcel of Dickinson land, his sister Vinnie consented. But Emily refused to sign the deed: she controlled that narrative. Her refusal to meet the mistress was similarly no act of reticence but, like her thank-you note, an act of withering aggression. People were scared of Emily Dickinson, and rightly so.

"We do not have much poetry," said the young Dickinson of her household, "father having made up his mind that its pretty much all *real life*. Fathers real life and *mine* sometimes come into collision, but as yet, escape unhurt!" The collision was between the everyday language of thank-you notes and the disruptive language of poetry, of which Dickinson was a native speaker. Once, when her mother was trying to make a houseguest comfortable, Dickinson couldn't help but transform her mother's solicitous questions into provocations: "Wouldn't you like to have the Declaration of Independence to read? Or the Lord's Prayer repeated?" It's hard to imagine how such biting repartee would be received, and neither did Dickinson hold back when the stakes were higher. "Have you said your prayers?" demanded her teacher at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. "Yes," answered Dickinson, "though it can't make much difference to the Creator." Notoriously, when Dickinson refused to be "saved," she was relegated to the lowest category of human beings—the "no-hopers."

The stakes were even higher when Dickinson was dealing not with figures of authority but with her peers—people with whom she hoped to share the intensity that distinguished her. "I have dared to do strange things—bold things," she confided to her friend Jane Humphrey, "and have asked no advice from any—I have heeded beautiful tempters, yet do not think I am wrong.... Oh Jennie, it would relieve me to tell you all, to sit down at your feet, and look in your eyes, and confess what *you only* shall know." Jane Humphrey did not respond to this letter. "No day goes by, little One, but has its thought of you, and its wish to see you," Dickinson wrote to Jane five years later. Again there was no response. It's tempting to speculate about the revelation Dickinson longed to make, but all speculation inevitably feels inadequate. "I have dared to do strange things": this is the language of poetry, not the language of what Dickinson's father called real life. If Jane could have imagined what Dickinson was talking about, she wouldn't have run away, and her inability to imagine makes Dickinson's ardor seem all the more threatening.

The young Dickinson was so volatile, so volcanic in her intuitions that she could clear a room. Mental and emotional acuity of that level is frightening because people have no way of explaining its source. It requires no nurturing. It expands not only without the intervention of other people but without

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the effort of the person who possesses it—or is possessed by it. It simply happens. Not many people want to have tea with the Delphic Oracle, however mesmerizing her speech. So, by a very early age, Dickinson learned that if she was going to have any friends, she needed to prevaricate. She also learned how little she gained from such prevarication. The few people to whom she truly made herself available were able to withstand the onslaught. Sue welcomed it. In contrast, after receiving just a couple of well-aimed gusts, Mabel Loomis Todd was shaken to the root—driven to own the poet who would not countenance her, much as she had been driven to possess the poet's brother.

Dickinson's reclusiveness was not a way of protecting herself from the world but a way of protecting the world from herself. Jane Humphrey was the first in a long list of people Dickinson frightened simply by existing, and frightening people became a demoralizing occupation. Even more demoralizing was the effort to speak the language of real life: poetry was Dickinson's native tongue—not a transparent sentence like "I know not how to thank you" but elusive sentences like "I have dared to do strange things" or "Thanks for the Ethiopian Face." By the time she sent that sentence to Mabel Loomis Todd, nominally in thanks for the painted jug, Dickinson knew what she was doing, and she knew that it would work. Dickinson constructed her true self in her poetry, which had to be kept secret from almost everyone, since even the slightest release of it into the real world could be explosive.

But what makes Dickinson's greatest poems even more threatening is that they blur the difference between the language of everyday life and the language of poetry, making our own lives feel explosive:

> I cannot live with You—
> It would be Life—
> And Life is over there—
> Behind the Shelf
>
> The Sexton keeps the key to—

The language is not complicated here. Only four of these twenty-three words have more than one syllable, and the syllables are arranged in a meter and rhyme scheme familiar to us from innumerable ballads and hymns. But at the same time, Dickinson's idiosyncratic punctuation keeps those syllables from settling too happily into those familiar forms, and the poem's relationship to those forms is as edgy as its professed relationship to the restricting terms of everyday life: to live with another person, however beloved, is to be a pretty piece of porcelain, locked forever behind the sexton's shelf. The prospects of dying together or rising together after death are no less problematic, and the poem's final stanza is both witheringly stern and wildly metaphorical in acceptance of human solitude:

> So we must meet apart—
> You there—I—here—
> With just the Door ajar
> That Oceans are—and Prayer—
> And that White Sustenance—
> Despair—

Solitude is not a state merely to be chosen. The space between any two human beings, however proximate, is as astonishing as an ocean, and Dickinson lived and wrote in order to honor that astonishment.

As was often her practice, Dickinson offered several choices for certain words in this poem: the "White Sustenance" of despair might be a "White exercise" or a "White privilege." Dickinson couldn't choose between these alternatives, and she doesn't want us to choose, either; the existential dilemma embodied by the poem cannot be locked up in words too easily. This is why her poems are so endlessly unsettling—they threaten constantly to exceed themselves. And this is why Dickinson the person was similarly so unnerving, not only to other people but to herself. To capitulate to the terms of the everyday world of human congress, to pretend that an ocean doesn't separate us all, was paradoxically to alienate herself. The despair of isolation might be a sustenance, and it might be an exercise, but it is also a privilege.

Yet Lyndall Gordon believes there is a "simpler reason" for Dickinson's seclusion, and here *Lives Like Loaded Guns* takes a peculiar turn. One of Dickinson's most famous poems describes a state of psychological disorientation that invokes, among other things, one of the most essential pleasures of poetry—its propensity to turn swiftly against itself, the sound of language seducing us through a discontinuity of sense:

> The thought behind, I strove to join
> Unto the thought before—
> But Sequence ravelled out of Sound—
> Like Balls—opon a Floor—

This is the feeling aroused by Dickinson's gnomic thank-you note to Mabel Loomis Todd, and while the feeling of radical discontinuity can be scary, poems exist to make that feeling enjoyable: by shirking our everyday notions of usefulness, they allow us to take pleasure in an utterance that we may not yet fully comprehend. Gordon recognizes this, and she cautions against the urge to read the language of poetry as a transparent vehicle for the poet's life. Yet Gordon is at the same time willing to ask this question about Dickinson's poem: "are we not looking at epilepsy?"

However efficient its means, *Lives Like Loaded Guns* ultimately feels divided in its ends. This is not because half the book is given over to events that occur after Dickinson's death; the documented passion with which Dickinson's heirs battled one another helps us to imagine more clearly the undocumented passion of Dickinson's life. The book feels divided against itself because Gordon becomes seduced by a posthumous medical diagnosis as the key to all Dickinson mythologies. Evidence is available; two of Dickinson's close relatives were epileptic, including Sue and Austin's older son, and medical records show that Dickinson was sometimes prescribed drugs associated with the treatment of epilepsy (though Gordon is always careful to point out that these drugs were prescribed for a variety of reasons). Inconclusive in itself, evidence breeds speculation. "Sickness is a more sensible reason for [Dickinson's] seclusion than disappointed love," argues Gordon logically enough, but who believes any longer that this intimidating woman, an artist with the power to create the world in which she walked, was driven into seclusion by a broken heart? Speculation becomes assertion: "To keep epilepsy the secret it had to be, she must remain at home as long as she lived." I can imagine this reclusive woman as the author of the sentence "I know not how to thank you" but not of "Thanks for the Ethiopian Face" or "the Door ajar/That Oceans are."

Even if it could be proved that Dickinson was epileptic, the revelation would explain almost nothing about her and even less about her poems. A variety of factors may well have determined Dickinson's decision to seclude herself, but to champion illness as the single most determining factor is to disregard what is otherwise so bracing about *Lives Like Loaded Guns*: its portrayal of Emily Dickinson as an artist who was, during her lifetime, the victim of nothing. While the posthumous legend constructed by Sue's daughter Mattie "built up a pitiful Emily bereft, for life, of the one and only man she loved," says Gordon, the legend constructed by Mabel's daughter Millicent offers "a pitiful Emily 'hurt,' for life, by her 'cruel' sister-in-law from whom she withdrew into disillusioned seclusion." Having so deftly analyzed the various and pernicious

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ways in which Dickinson's life has been packaged at the expense of her poems, why does Gordon offer one more solution? A "solution" is precisely what her publisher proclaims that *Lives Like Loaded Guns* offers, and it's hard not to feel discouraged by the assertion, which does both Dickinson and Gordon the disservice of enlisting them in one more mercantile gambit. Fortunately, the solution is unconvincing, and the otherwise brilliant pages of *Lives Like Loaded Guns* float free of it.

"Abyss has no Biographer," wrote Dickinson, who even among poets had an extraordinarily high appetite for the abyss. "An initiation in infinitude was the gift Dickinson offered to the few she admitted to intimacy," says Gordon. "Contrary to the usual view that people changed her, it was she who operated on others for the brief periods they could bear it." Gordon has made this person vivid, and by doing so, she reminds us that the few people who could bear Dickinson's true company were as bewildered as the majority of people who could not. Those few were the kinds of people who also like to read poems, the kinds of people who perhaps also want to make them. Dickinson's father was no such person, but at least in one regard he did come to see his daughter truly: as head of the household, he relieved her of morning duties so that she might begin her reading and writing at 3 AM.

Such privacy is crucial for any writer, but Dickinson had the inevitable misfortune, especially after her death, of being surrounded by people for whom the act of writing was not private enough, or for whom the act of privacy took on warped and astonishing forms. The companion of Dickinson's niece Mattie, Alfred Leete Hampson, didn't want to leave Dickinson's manuscripts in the Evergreens while he traveled to Europe, so every winter he packed up almost 1,000 poems and 200 letters in a suitcase and took "Emily" along. It's because of the efforts of such people, however complex their motives, that we are now able to read Dickinson at all, but of the many fascinating characters surrounding the poet in *Lives Like Loaded Guns*, my favorite is Dickinson's cousin Loo Norcross, who enraged Mabel Loomis Todd by refusing to hand over the letters Dickinson had written to her. It's impossible not to imagine the poet's approval.

> The Soul selects her own Society—
> Then—shuts the Door—

Loo kept the letters with her in a nursing home until she died in 1919; then the letters were burned. ■

GREGORY BULL/AP

A map of Mexico made of corn at the Zócalo, the main plaza in Mexico City, 2009

Retreat to Subsistence

by PETER CANBY

Aldo González is a tall, square-shouldered Zapotec Indian of 45 whose long hair falls halfway down his back. He is one of 400,000 Zapotecs whose ancestors built Monte Albán, one of the greatest and earliest cities of Mesoamerica, and who have lived in this part of Oaxaca, high in the Sierra Juárez mountains, for thousands of years. The Zapotecs refer to themselves as the "people of the clouds," and most in the villages speak Zapotec. Virtually all land is held communally.

González studied electronic communication at a polytechnic university in Mexico City, but soon after receiving his degree he returned to Oaxaca, where he helps run the Unión de Organizaciones de la Sierra Juárez de Oaxaca (UNOSJO), a civil organization that represents Zapotec communities and their concerns. At the top of the list is corn, the farming of which is at the heart of Zapotec culture, as it is for all indigenous cultures in Mexico. But corn culture, and indigenous Mexicans, have been under siege ever since NAFTA went into effect in 1994 and the Mexican government concurrently initiated a number of measures designed to eliminate the country's small-farm sector, which includes most indigenous corn farmers. The thinking behind the government's decision was more economic than anti-indigenous—although it was arguably that too. Small farmers have long been the poorest of the poor in Mexico, and from the time of Mexico's revolution they have received government subsidies. The government's position on corn has been succinctly explained by Jorge Castañeda, former foreign minister under President Vicente Fox and now a professor at New York University (Fox was elected in 2000, six years after NAFTA). In his book *Ex Mex* (2007), Castañeda observes that it was "unclear…whether the rest of Mexican society should continue to subsidize 2.5 million families that will never escape from poverty growing corn on barren, rain-fed, tiny plots of land."

Like the Zapotecs, many of these farmers consider growing corn more than an economic activity. It is something closer to a defining way of life. Since NAFTA, to the surprise of government planners in Mexico City, many indigenous farmers, including the Zapotec members of UNOSJO, have in effect chosen to withdraw from the national economy, some weaning themselves off expensive chemical fertilizers and subsisting on the corn they can grow, harvest and barter. Economists refer to this phenomenon as a "retreat to subsistence," and life has not been easy for those who have stuck with farming. Poverty has descended upon the Mexican countryside and especially its indigenous areas, which are concentrated in Mexico's south. In 2003 the World Bank reported that 40 percent of Mexicans lived in poverty but that in the heavily indigenous southern Mexican states of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero, 70 percent lived in "extreme poverty," a condition in which a population is unable to secure a daily minimum food requirement.

Despite those who continue farming, like Aldo González, many others have quit. By some estimates, dispossessed farmers account for almost half of the 500,000 or so Mexicans who, until the recent recession, immigrated illegally to the United States each year. González told me of whole villages where only the elderly remain.

Peter Canby is a senior editor at The New Yorker *and the author of* The Heart of the Sky: Travels Among the Maya.

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Maize—"corn" in the vernacular—is, in the amount produced, the largest grain crop in the world. In most places it is grown as animal feed; but in Mexico, for reasons unique to the country's culinary history, it provides some 70 percent of the caloric intake of rural families. Part of the process of making tortillas and tamales in Mexico is the pre-Columbian practice of lime cooking known as "nixtamalization," which increases the availability of calcium, amino acids and niacin in corn. Nixtamalization makes maize—especially when combined with beans—a complete protein. In the Popul Vuh, the ancient Maya book of origins, the first men are made of corn; part of the sway that corn holds over the region is that it evolved here. Archaeobotanists believe that some 9,000 years ago in the Rio Balsas valley in the Mexican state of Guerrero, early agriculturists began cultivating teosinte, a native grass, by carefully selecting for a series of mutations that included a sealed seed head and multiple rows of kernels attached to a central axis.

To this day, indigenous farmers continue to comb their fields for successful plants with useful characteristics, saving their seeds and exchanging them with neighbors. This process is central to indigenous culture in Mexico, and through continuous breeding indigenous agriculturists have internalized and accelerated the process of not just crop domestication but also plant evolution. In the Mexican countryside there are fifty-nine corn "landraces," distinct cultivars that have been carefully developed over millenniums by indigenous farmers for different attributes: growth at high altitudes, early or late maturation, the ability to withstand drought or heavy rain and utility for particular dishes or shamanic rituals.

Mexico's landrace corn is consumed locally, but because it benefits from 9,000 years of breeding for diverse conditions, it represents a reservoir of genetic adaptability that many consider essential to the future of the world's commercial corn crop. Kathleen McAfee, a political economist at San Francisco State University, observed that Mexican landraces "may even prove vital in the future to the continued productivity of corn farming worldwide, given that new traits must be continuously added to maize and other crops as crop pests evolve and climatic conditions change."

Landrace preservation, moreover, reflects a larger issue. Mexico has long been recognized as one of the world's most biodiverse regions. Along its mountainous spine, the climate ranges from neotropical to Nearctic. Over time, as the earth has warmed and cooled, various plant communities migrating between North and South America have become isolated among Mexico's deep valleys and high peaks, where they have evolved in exotic isolation. Indigenous cornfields in Mexico are known as *milpas*. Typically, *milpas* contain not just landrace corn but also squash, beans and other crops that farmers have coaxed out of their biodiverse surroundings through astute and assiduous husbandry. Because so many staple crops evolved in the region, it is considered a "center of origin" of crops, one of the few in the world.

What's particularly notable about Mexican cornfields are the "weeds" that coexist with more established crops and, in many cases, have herbal and culinary uses. A 2004 report by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), an environmental organization created by a side treaty of NAFTA, noted that "this group of species are not 'weeds'" in the narrow American and European sense. "The relationships of Mexican poor peasants with their 'weeds' may be quite complex," and weeds "represent a rich genetic resource on which selection towards domestication may take place."

Aldo González and other indigenous farmers are well aware of their link to the ancient practice of plant domestication. One morning not long ago González and I walked into his *milpa* through stands of dahlias and wild salvia. In addition to showing me his two-month-old white corn and his snaky squash and bean vines, he pointed out a wild, self-sown tomato; an *Amaranthus*, a relative of the grain crop widely eaten by indigenous people in South America; and a traditional Zapotec medicinal herb used to coax out "*malos aires*." Around the edges of the field, González identified a wild avocado tree, a grove of *guayabas* and a *huaje* tree, an edible bean tree from whose name the city name of Oaxaca is derived. "The important thing," he told me, "is that we clean out and plant the fields but don't break the connection to the surrounding ecosystem. These fields are part of the natural system; they're not apart from it."

Inside Mexico, NAFTA was the project of a group widely referred to as "technocrats" in the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari who belonged to the modernizing wing of Mexico's ruling party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). When Salinas came into office in 1988, the government—as a legacy of Mexico's revolution—was highly protectionist, strong on social services and involved in one way or another with just about every aspect of the economy. By the standards of modern free-market economies, Mexico was inefficient and often corrupt, and people were relatively poor, but the government's social and economic benefits were widespread.

Salinas and his technocrats decided to slash the safety net and throw open Mexico to free trade. Salinas argued that Mexico's low wages and physical proximity to the United States gave it a natural advantage as an exporter, and he promised to close the wage gap between the two countries by developing an export economy. He thereby aimed to solve the historic problem of immigration to

In This Essay

Ex Mex
From Migrants to Immigrants.
By Jorge Castañeda.
New Press. 240 pp. Paper $17.95.

Sin Maíz, no Hay País
Edited by Gustavo Esteva and Catherine Marielle.
Cultures Populares de México. 346 pp.

NAFTA's Promise and Reality
Lessons From Mexico for the Hemisphere.
By the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
88 pp. Available at carnegieendowment.org.

The Impact of Genetically Engineered Crops on Farm Sustainability in the United States
By the National Research Council.
National Academies Press. $40.50.

Environmental Effects of Transgenic Plants
The Scope and Adequacy of Regulation.
By the National Research Council.
National Academies Press.
320 pp. $44.96.

Maize and Biodiversity
The Effects of Transgenic Maize in Mexico.
By the Commission for Environmental Cooperation.
50 pp. Available at cec.org.

Failure to Yield
Evaluating the Performance of Genetically Engineered Crops.
By the Union of Concerned Scientists.
43 pp. Available at ucsusa.org.

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the United States. Mexico, Salinas promised, would "export goods, not people."

For many Mexicans and non-Mexicans at the time, the prospect of change was welcome. According to Laura Carlsen, director of the Mexico City–based Americas Program of the Center for International Policy, "There was a feeling of euphoria. People were convinced [NAFTA] was going to create jobs, create industrial corridors, reduce emigration and get people out of rural areas where they didn't have services. At that point, no one was talking about the ties of indigenous people to the land."

Part of the thinking behind NAFTA involved the doctrine of "comparative advantage," the idea that in global trade each country should take advantage of its natural strengths. Mexico's advantage was its cheap and plentiful labor force; however, although corn had evolved in Mexico and has been grown there for thousands of years, the negotiators agreed that the United States had the comparative advantage in corn production. According to Michael Pollan in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), because of hybrid corn and synthetic nitrogen fertilizer, the fruits of the "Green Revolution" of the 1950s and '60s, the productivity of corn farms in the United States has increased from twenty bushels an acre in 1920 to as many as 200 now.

But Pollan and others have argued that comparisons of small-scale and industrial productivity can be deceptive. Each bushel of industrial corn in the United States requires between a quarter and a third of a gallon of oil for fuel, fertilizer and other applications. This can add up to fifty gallons or more of oil per acre, a level of consumption that is practicable only as long as fossil fuel is cheap. Heavy government subsidies paid to farmers, moreover, have also masked the real cost of corn. Pollan tells us that in Iowa, in 2005, it cost $2.50 to grow a bushel of corn that sold at the grain elevator for $1.45.

Industrial agriculture can also have steep "external costs." Timothy Wise, research director of the Global Development and Environment Institute at Tufts University, points out that corn is one of the most chemically dependent crops. Moreover, the prices at which it is sold fail to account for the associated environmental damage caused by chemicals. High on the list of damages is the growing "dead zone" at the mouth of the Mississippi River in the Gulf of Mexico; roughly the size of New Jersey, the area is almost devoid of marine life as a result of nitrogen runoff.

The NAFTA negotiators overlooked these concerns. Soon after NAFTA was signed, tariffs on corn from the United States were eliminated and US corn began flooding Mexico. Corn was further subsidized for export by the US government and arrived in Mexico at 20 percent below its already subsidized cost of production. Much of the corn from the United States was intended as animal feed, but it depressed the price of corn generally and by 2008 the real price paid to Mexican corn farmers had dropped 50 percent.

Simultaneously, within Mexico the government dismantled programs that had supported small farmers since the revolution. At the time NAFTA took effect, a government agency known as CONASUPO handled more than half of the nation's corn crop; it administered price supports, offered storage infrastructure and assured minimum incomes through subsidies. By 1999 CONASUPO had been phased out, leaving Mexican farmers to their own devices; meanwhile, in the United States, the 1996 and 2002 farm bills approximately doubled agricultural subsidies.

Not everyone agreed with the NAFTA agricultural measures. Alejandro Nadal, a professor of economics at the Colegio de México, is critical of the government's failure to think through the dismantling of "the most strategic sector of Mexico's agricultural economy." As Nadal told me, "There were 3 million corn producers and five people per producer family. That's 15 million people. Then there were transporters and other attached industries—22 million people—a quarter of the country's population. Before putting the corn sector into NAFTA, wouldn't you think about it twice? The government had no single study for why they put corn into NAFTA."

In an essay in *Sin Maíz, no Hay País*, a book on Mexico's corn crisis published in 2003, David Barkin, a professor at the Autonomous Metropolitan University of Mexico, quotes a Salinas-era technocrat who says that it was the administration's policy to remove half of the population from Mexico's rural areas within five years. It's unclear what the government ever had in mind for the displaced farmers. At the time, a political scientist who closely monitored Mexican politics told me, "They have no credible prediction as to where these people will be employed. My guess is that they're thinking Los Angeles."

In general terms, the Salinas administration assumed NAFTA export industries would generate jobs for displaced farmers. It was soon proved wrong. According to *NAFTA's Promise and Reality*, a well-regarded 2004 report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in the first decade of NAFTA a million workers a year entered the Mexican labor force, while the economy created only half a million jobs annually. Perhaps not coincidentally, the tide of immigration to the United States swelled during these years to about the same number—half a million a year.

In New York City I asked the Mexican economist Juan Carlos Moreno-Brid why the Mexican export-oriented economy had not been able to grow the way China's export-oriented economy has. China, he explained, has followed an industrial policy that has created "linkages" requiring foreign investors to buy materials in China. The effect has been to spread around the export growth. NAFTA, by contrast, was deeply rooted in the philosophy of free trade (economists speak of it as one of the most extreme free-trade agreements ever negotiated) and specifically precluded any such arrangements. Mexico developed an export sector, Moreno-Brid told me, but it consisted largely of *maquiladora* plants assembling imported components. These plants generated relatively few, relatively low-paid jobs, and their influence has not spread into the larger economy.

There are, of course, other problems with NAFTA. The economist Thomas Palley refers to it as "a watershed in international agreements," a new type of treaty in which production floats between countries "always threatened by competition from poorer countries below." Palley's point is well illustrated in *Murder City*, Charles Bowden's chilling book about the border city of Juárez. Over the past decade, according to Bowden, approximately 100,000 jobs have left Juárez for China because China's wages are only a quarter of the already punishingly low wages in Juárez. The main consequence of Juárez's low wages and disappearing jobs is the drug business. "In Juárez," Bowden writes, "the payroll for the employees in the drug industry exceeds the payroll for all the factories in the city."

Genetically modified corn was first commercially planted in the United States in 1996. By 2000 it already accounted for 25 percent of the US crop, and according to *The Impact of Genetically Engineered Crops on Farm Sustainability in the United States*, a recently released report from the National Research Council, by 2009 it accounted for 85 percent. Virtually all genetically modified corn is of two technologically simple types: a corn implanted with a *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) gene that imparts resistance to several insects; and

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SHELF LIFE

by JOHN PALATTELLA

IN 1985 THE RENOWNED FILMMAKER Miguel Littín slipped into Chile disguised as a Uruguayan businessman. Aided by three European production crews ostensibly working on commercial films, Littín covertly shot footage of daily life under Gen. Augusto Pinochet, whose brutal 1973 coup had sent Littín into exile. In 1986 Gabriel García Márquez recounted Littín's escapade in *Clandestine in Chile*, which New York Review Books has reissued in the original English translation by Asa Zatz (paper $14). The story is spellbinding, but it is less about political intrigue—there are just several accounts of close calls with *carabineros*—than the fortitude of an artist in the face of an implacable force. It is also a story of triumph. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Col. Aureliano Buendía fights thirty-two wars and loses every one. In May 1985 Littín managed to slip out of Chile with 100,000 feet of footage that was edited into a television documentary and feature film. Eighteen months later the Pinochet government burned 15,000 copies of *Clandestine in Chile*, proof that García Márquez had wounded the general who had deposed his beloved Salvador Allende. The point of view of *Clandestine in Chile* may be Littín's—the story is told in his voice, its details culled from a tape-recorded eighteen-hour interview about his exploit—but its vision could only be that of García Márquez: "In the midst of the carnival of life and death, the Recoleta Bridge is like an indiscriminate lover, serving markets and cemetery alike. During the day, funerals push their way through the crowds. At night, when there is no curfew, Recoleta is the only road to the tango clubs, where the best dancers are gravediggers by day."

WHEN JARON LANIER GOES ONLINE these days, he feels like a man on a gray flannel site. A pioneer of virtual reality, an early contributor to *Wired* and a Silicon Valley shaman, Lanier is skeptical of the hive mind spawned by the social-media technologies of web 2.0. The gist of his new book, *You Are Not a Gadget* (Knopf; $24.95), is that the freedom of the network—and networking—offered by web 2.0 titans like Google, Wikipedia and Facebook "is more for machines than people."

Although his subject isn't Soviet communism or postwar American capitalism, Lanier's ire seems tinged with the spirit of Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*. Social media, Lanier argues, is a form of repression that has strangled the limitless creative potential of the early Internet. Web 2.0 creates false, shallow needs that draw individuals into a tight network of impoverished, commercialized relationships that stifle individual expression and critical thought. "If a church or government were doing these things, it would feel authoritarian, but when technologists are the culprits, we seem hip, fresh, and inventive," Lanier says with some pique. That diagnosis stokes a jeremiad about the conflict between the "adventurous individual imagination" and the hive mind. Lanier's rhapsodies about the former are often jejune and recall *The Fountainhead*'s Howard Roark more than Marcuse, and García Márquez's *Clandestine in Chile* is a chilling reminder that authoritarianism amounts to more than packs of trolls hazing people online.

When Lanier sticks to explaining the commercial dynamics of web 2.0, however, his observations are bracing and not easily dismissed. "Because of the enhanced network effect of all things digital, it's tough for any new player to become profitable in advertising since Google has already seized a key digital niche (its ad exchange).... Digital network architectures naturally incubate monopolies." What's more, "the combination of hive mind and advertising has resulted in a new kind of social contract. The basic idea of this contract is that authors, journalists, musicians, and artists are encouraged to treat the fruits of their intellects and imaginations as fragments to be given away without pay to the hive mind. Reciprocity takes the form of self-promotion. Culture is to become precisely nothing but advertising." To extend the thought: editors who justify not paying online contributors on the grounds that *gratis* articles provide invaluable exposure are not publishing journalism. They are grifters running editorial scams and killing journalism in the process.

A GRIFT OF COLOSSAL PROPORTIONS is the subject of *The End of Wall Street* (Penguin Press; $27.95). Roger Lowenstein's book isn't the first to suggest that the Great Recession is the result of the wholesale failure of the financial sector to allocate capital and manage risk, but its meticulous and exhaustive account of Wall Street's role in creating the housing bubble that precipitated the crisis is among the best currently available. The book is essentially a study of capitalists making money without capital. Banks relied on excess leverage to buy and trade exotic assets—mortgage-backed securities, derivatives—whose value was inherently unstable. But the trades and fees generated by the practice of borrowing short and lending long were too tempting to resist. In the 1930s banks failed because they couldn't fulfill depositors' immediate demand for cash. In 2007 investment banks failed because, their losses mounting and lacking sufficient capital, they had to sell loans instead of making new ones, but the loans on their books had plummeted in value. (Lowenstein traces the reliance on short-term IOUs to bad ideas about efficient markets and asset maximization peddled by economists in the 1980s.) *The End of Wall Street* is also a stinging morality tale about bunco optimists and feckless CEOs. Lowenstein describes a lunch date of Citigroup CEO Vikram Pandit's at Manhattan's swanky Le Bernardin. The bubble had burst, Lehman Brothers had gone under and Citi's stock was in the single digits. At lunch Pandit was not impressed by the wines available by the glass; he ordered a $350 bottle of wine "so he could savor 'a glass of wine worth drinking.'" ■

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(continued from page 32)
another implanted with a gene that creates tolerance to glyphosate, an herbicide. The latter allows farmers to spray entire fields without damaging the crop. The National Research Council report points out that even though genetically modified corn seed costs considerably more, it saves farmers the costs of other, often more environmentally damaging pesticides and herbicides and the labor costs of applying them. "It's a business model, really," a prominent biologist explained to me.

After harvest in the United States, genetically modified and non–genetically modified corn are freely mixed, and without elaborate testing it is impossible to tell the difference between them. At the time NAFTA was negotiated, genetically modified corn had not been an issue, but as corn from the United States began to inundate Mexico, the Mexican government became concerned that it could crossbreed with Mexican landraces, possibly leading to hybrids that could overrun native corn. In 1998 the government issued a moratorium on planting genetically modified corn. By then, however, the United States was shipping millions of tons of corn to Mexico, any single kernel of which could be genetically modified. The moratorium proved unenforceable. (It has recently been rescinded—although only in areas deemed not to be "centers of origin" of corn.)

Scientists with reservations about genetically engineered crops maintain that the ways in which transgenes—the packages of genetic material implanted in a host plant—interact with the genome of the host are little understood. Transgenes, they argue, are inserted into the host genome largely at random and could make their way to unintended parts of the host genome and switch on unintended genes. "We know very little about what happens after the transgenic insert," Paul Gepts, a professor of plant science at the University of California, Davis, told me.

A larger concern with genetically modified crops is spelled out in *Environmental Effects of Transgenic Plants*, a 2002 report from the National Research Council. It describes the tendency of introduced crops to hybridize with populations of their wild relatives. In a number of instances, this led to the creation of weedy hybrids that overran local wild populations and made them extinct, sometimes within a decade or less. The report refers to the field of "invasion biology" and notes that there's more to learn about the reasons for different degrees of invasiveness. The tendency of hybrid species to invade populations of their wild relatives is well documented, however, and the report noted that there was no reason to believe transgenic plants would behave any differently.

These concerns had special resonance in Mexico. Corn cultivation here differs radically from that in the United States. In the United States, commercial corn is grown each year from new seeds. At the end of the year, whatever traits corn possesses—or may have picked up—disappear. In Mexico, by contrast, seed preservation and exchange is central to indigenous corn culture. Landrace corn, moreover, is "open pollinated": through the exchange of pollen, it can pick up and pass along whatever traits happen to be in adjacent plants—including genetically modified plants. If landrace corn happened to pick up genetically modified genes, those genes could be passed through seeds to subsequent generations.

In Mexico, seed preservation and exchange is central to indigenous corn culture.

In the United States, moreover, there are virtually no wild relatives of corn, and the possibility that transgenes might move from modified to wild corn plants has been little studied. Regulatory policies are based, as Kathleen McAfee puts it, on the idea that transgenes "will remain confined to the crop and the harvest cycle into which they were intentionally placed." In Mexico, by contrast, there are dozens of landrace corns with which genetically modified corn might interbreed. The Mexican government's concern, therefore, was that if genetically modified genes were to get into landraces, not only would they not be removable but they could lead to their extinction.

In the late 1990s Zapotec farmers in Oaxaca began to notice what they thought were unusual numbers of mutant plants in their fields. Already inflamed by the government's agricultural policies, the Zapotecs were deeply suspicious of genetically modified corn and approached two scientists then working in the area, Ignacio Chapela and David Quist of the University of California, Berkeley, and asked them to test the plants for evidence of transgenes.

In their lab, Chapela and Quist found not only evidence of transgenes but also, to their great surprise, what they considered to be clear evidence that the genetically modified genes had fragmented and become redistributed within the host plants. This seemed to fulfill the worst fears of those concerned about genetically modified crops: that implanted genes were unstable and could run wild inside related genomes. In November 2001 Chapela and Quist published their findings in *Nature*. Their paper caused an immediate uproar. Both scientists had been outspoken in their opposition to a recent funding agreement between their department and Novartis, whereby in exchange for millions of dollars the department had given the agro-biotech giant a significant stake in its research. Reactions to Chapela and Quist's paper depended largely on how people felt about the Novartis controversy. Critics argued that the article's evidence failed to support the authors' second point—that genetically modified genes were unstable within the genomes of their host plants.

Under tremendous pressure, *Nature* published an unprecedented statement criticizing the evidence for this assertion. Chapela and Quist stood by their findings, and supporters of the two scientists argued that *Nature*'s statement was inappropriate: the paper had been peer-reviewed; postpublication debates often discover weaknesses in published research, and the normal procedure would be a follow-up article. The controversy was unusually bitter and personal, and raged far beyond the pages of *Nature*. Eventually, the *Guardian* reported that among the most persistent of Chapela and Quist's critics were a pair of fictitiously named web posters connected to a Washington PR firm hired by Monsanto, the world's leading producer of genetically engineered seeds.

Chapela and Quist's paper nevertheless generated further studies—some confirmed transgressed genes, but others did not. Most recently, a study by an international team led by Elena Alvarez-Buylla of the National Autonomous University of Mexico and published in the journal *Molecular Ecology* seems conclusively to support Chapela and Quist's findings. Ultimately, the resolution of the issues raised by Chapela and Quist is less significant than the agitation their *Nature* paper caused in the Mexican countryside. In 2002, not long after the paper appeared, a group of Zapotec leaders from the municipality of Ixtlán de Juárez, supported by three Mexican environmental groups, filed a petition with the Commission for Environmental Cooperation to

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conduct a study of the implications of the genetically-modified-corn problem.

The CEC's report, *Maize and Biodiversity: The Effects of Transgenic Maize in Mexico*, appeared in 2004 and consisted of a workmanlike summary volume and ten beautifully detailed background chapters—a number of which are almost novelistic in their complexity. The background chapters were written by leading biologists as well as experts on the politics and sociology of the Mexican countryside, and they examine the political, social and ecological value of indigenous cornfields and also the ways genetically modified genes might flow through those cornfields. Timothy Wise at Tufts told me that *Maize and Biodiversity* is "the best study of gene flow to date."

The CEC report argued that because the ecology of a traditional Mexican cornfield is so much more complicated than that of cornfields in the United States, studies conducted in the United States of the interaction between genetically modified corn and its surrounding environment were useless in Mexico. "Will the introduction of transgenic maize have a positive or negative effect on natural ecosystems in Mexico?" one of the CEC background chapters asked, concluding that "existing data on transgenic maize will not address the question sufficiently."

The report held that "the introgression of a few individual transgenes is unlikely to have any major biological effect on genetic diversity in maize landraces." But it went on to argue that not enough was known about the ways genetically modified plants would behave in the complex environment of a Mexican cornfield to rule out the possibility that an introgression of genetically modified genes would produce a weedy superhybrid that could overrun not just native landraces but also the wild teosinte grass that still grows around indigenous cornfields. One of the background chapters pointed out that such an outcome would be a "catastrophe" that could gravely reduce the genetic diversity of the world's corn.

In the end, the authors of the CEC study unanimously agreed that until the effects of introgressed transgenes could be properly studied, all 6 million tons of US corn then entering Mexico each year should be ground at the border before being transported into the country. In doing so, the report's authors evoked a regulatory category increasingly used in international environmental law and known as the "precautionary principle." The CEC's authors argued that, given the possibility of irreversible damage to the heritage of corn in Mexico, the genetically modified corn industry bore the burden of proving its safety. This was significant for US agribusiness because the logic of the precautionary principle had once been used to bar US corn from the European Union.

The reaction in Washington was furious. Judith Ayres, a Bush appointee and the assistant administrator of the office of international activities for the Environmental Protection Agency, appended comments to the summary report. She attacked the degree to which it combined political and scientific issues and failed to consider the benefits of post-NAFTA agricultural developments—particularly to the growth of the Mexican livestock industry (a market for much imported corn). It ultimately lacked "policy relevance," Ayres declared. It was too late for the summary report to be withdrawn, but the ten background chapters that treated different aspects of the problem in such fascinating detail were never published and effectively suppressed. (They are nevertheless archived at www.cec.org/page.asp?PageID=924&ContentID=2796.)

Many of the traits found in landrace corn are located in complex 'suites' of genes.

The underlying worry of scientists concerned about Mexico's landraces is the narrowness of the genetic base of commercial corn. As the effects of climate change become more pronounced, the corn belt in the United States will likely be affected not just by rising temperatures but also changing rainfall patterns. With these altered conditions will arrive plant diseases to which the corn crop has not previously been exposed. The devastation such diseases could wreak is hinted at by the effects of the Southern corn leaf blight in 1970. Before it was controlled, the blight destroyed 50 percent of the crop in some Southern states and 15 percent of the crop nationwide, and it caused $1 billion in damage.

I asked one of the CEC authors, Major Goodman, a professor of crop science at North Carolina State University and one of the nation's leading corn experts, about the condition of commercial corn in the United States. He compared it with that of potatoes in Ireland before the potato famine and then continued, "We're basically looking at the descendants of about seven inbred lines and the derivatives of those lines," he told me. "There are an awful lot of similar hybrids out there." Goodman is concerned about two diseases—one in Argentina and one in Africa. "Each is a virus spread by a leaf hopper" (a piercing insect that can spread plant diseases). "A leaf hopper could cling to a person's luggage or clothing and jump on a plane without trouble. I'm 99 percent certain that not a hybrid on the market has resistance."

The genetic material that the corn industry would use to breed in resistance to such a virus would typically originate in a germplasm bank—a specialized facility that stores the genetic material needed to reproduce important crops (germplasm banks in Mexico contain samples of the seeds of the nation's landrace corn). But as Goodman put it, "If we are to have climate change, it will be hard to meet the problems it presents out of a germplasm bank. Basically, germplasm banks deal in hundreds of kernels. The only way to make them available, in the case of rampant plant disease, would be to grow them out seed by seed."

Monsanto has recently said that it is working to address climate change and has promised to create crops that will require 30 percent less water, land and energy to grow. Specifically, it promises to develop a "drought gene" designed to dramatically reduce a plant's water consumption. Monsanto's drought-resistance work is widely believed to involve "transcription factors," types of master genes that regulate numerous other genes.

Industry critics are skeptical of Monsanto's claims. Goodman explained to me that to date there were essentially only two commercial gene-implant applications—Bt crops and glyphosate-resistant crops—and that each was the result of single-gene engineering. "Drought tolerance is a genetically complex trait," he said, and the present state of genetic modification is confined to implanting "single genes affecting single traits." Paul Gepts agreed with Goodman's point that drought resistance was a genetically complex trait and added that it would require an ability to engineer sequences of genes that had not yet been attained. "They may have something," he said, "but I'm skeptical. They have to please their stockholders. They have to attract capital."

Last year the Union of Concerned Scientists released *Failure to Yield: Evaluating the Performance of Genetically Engineered Crops*, a report that surveyed applications to the Agriculture Department seeking

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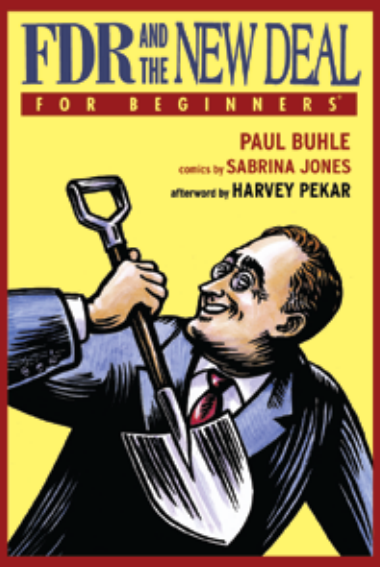

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permission for field trials of new types of transgenes. (Applications for the tests are public; the test results are confidential.) The report found that, from among thousands of applications, none beyond implants of single genes with Bt or with glyphosate resistance had resulted in commercially successful products (the report excluded a small number of virus-resistant traits). *Failure to Yield* attributed this state of affairs to the complexity of the roles played by the genes being experimented with (including transcription factors) and described these genes as being "parts of genetic networks that have multiple and far-reaching effects on the growth or development of the plant." Unlike the single-gene products now on the market, the report noted, the multiple-gene applications had greater potential for "deleterious unintended side effects."

Farmers have recently faced other problems with genetically modified crops. The seed industry has become concentrated in very few hands, and prices have soared. In the meantime, a number of weeds that had, until recently, been killed by glyphosate have evolved glyphosate resistance with alarming speed, requiring farmers to revert to older herbicides and dampening the appeal of the expensive modified seeds. One Iowa State weed scientist described the situation to the *New York Times* as "Darwinian evolution in fast forward."

Failure to Yield also looked at crop yield and concluded that genetically modified crops had done substantially less to increase yield than a number of more conventional measures, ranging from organic farming to a technologically sophisticated form of genetic breeding known as "marker-assisted selection." This has not led anyone to conclude that the engineering of transcription factors or other such complex multigene undertakings are unattainable but, rather, that their imminence may be overstated. "Eventually we will be able to engineer more than a single gene," Goodman says, "but there are complications, and it will take a hell of a long time to work them out."

This raises a question. Gepts had explained to me that many of the traits found in landrace corn are located in complex "suites" of genes. These traits include such properties as flowering time, crop yield and drought resistance. Considering that the multiple attributes of landrace corn are themselves the product of a sophisticated, longstanding tradition of crop breeding, would it be fair to think of landrace corn as having already achieved, on some level, the very properties that genetic-engineering firms were spending hundreds of millions of dollars to try to breed into commercial corn? If so, how had peasant farmers done this?

"In indigenous fields," Gepts told me, "these suites result from both environmental pressures and from farmer selection—probably more from the latter. These suites contain traits that have been selected by farmers over time," he said, "farmers with a very keen understanding of plants."

After leaving Aldo González's *milpa* I traveled west into the high, dissected plateau that is the home of the Mixtecs, Oaxaca's second-largest indigenous group. I had arranged to meet Jesús León Santos, the head of a Mixtec organization known as CEDICAM, which works to support traditional Mixtec agriculture. In recognition of CEDICAM's efforts, Jesús León had won a prize not long before from the Goldman Environmental Foundation in San Francisco.

Jesús León met me in his battered pickup truck outside the Mixtec town of Nochixtlán. As we drove, he recited a maxim of his father's: "Plant to eat first or you'll wind up working for others." He spoke of pressure from the government to persuade Mixtecs to plant hybrids, abandon their traditional landraces and use chemical fertilizers. He recounted the post-NAFTA decline in prices paid for corn and the simultaneous sharp rise in the price of fertilizers. ("Fertilizers damage the land, but the biggest damage is to the people, because they lose the ability to live off the land," he said.) He described government policies of *descampesinoización*—getting rid of small farmers—and of efforts to turn farmers into *manos de obra*, workers for factories and *maquiladoras*. He reflected on the toll of emigration: how it was mostly men who left and that husbandless households damaged the transmission of values between generations ("It will have an effect in the future").

Eventually, we arrived at Jesús León's *milpa*. He pointed out the landrace corn, squash, beans, a wild potato and various *quelites*—a Nahuatl word that has become a generic indigenous term for usable *milpa* weeds. I asked Jesús León about the ways *milpa* agriculture seemed to be about improving on nature, on natural processes.

He stopped—with the whole vulnerable world of traditional human agriculture around his feet. "No," he said, and seemed to care deeply that I follow precisely what he was saying. "It's not a way of improving nature—it's a way of getting closer to the processes of nature, getting as close as possible to what nature does." ■

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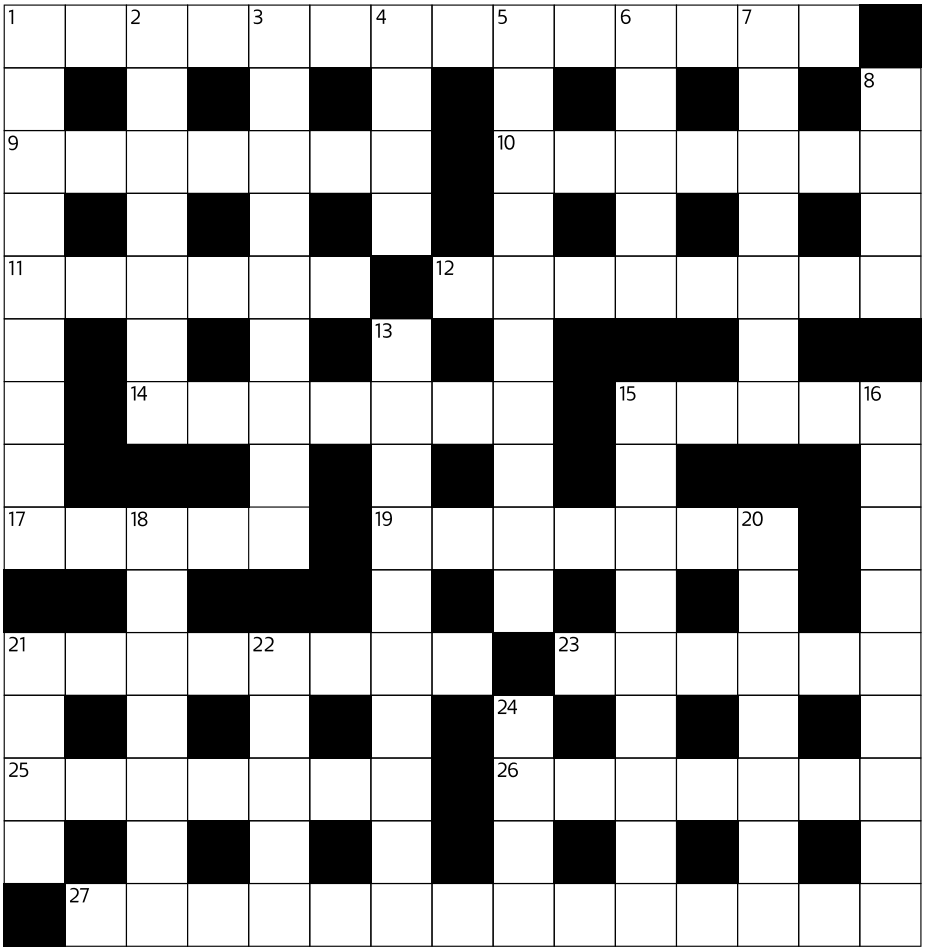
Puzzle No. 1592

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Something should, for a good spell. (4,4,1,5)

9 Just now appearing in China's centennial… (7)

10 …and an Egyptian title given over a century ago. (7)

11 One might in starting the story of how a minor collision may end. (6)

12 A valeric change in the manner of such as Charles. (8)

14 Alga, possibly. (7)

15 War might be—on a salary? (5)

17 I objectively returned, and came across the less familiar name of a social worker. (5)

19 Carry a challenge in your suitcase, perhaps? (7)

21 Measured by the feet, obviously. (5,3)

23 See 8 down

25 Start the tune with something fresh (we hope). (4,3)

26 What none but the brave deserve? (7)

27 Sounds as though someone brought a ringer to the dance? (5,2,3,4)

DOWN

1 and **21** Character proving a little ursine. (6,3,4)

2 Lives with unnatural desires? (7)

3 Get ready to have a child with an old street singer? That's the way to catch somone! (3,2,4)

4 A bird may fly better because of its tail. (4)

5 When the kids trip over their feet? (7,3)

6 Any he-animal gets shook up, but one just laughs. (5)

7 Sounds like the rule for pouring. (7)

8 and **23** across Evidently I'm accompanied by 21 down, if you'll just be patient! (4,4,2)

13 It might be the express law golfers break. (5,5)

15 Possibly a more wise description might be tedious. (9)

16 It certainly doesn't mean you've got it all together, making up lips as red as this. (9)

18 The cutter came the wrong way, evidently. (7)

20 This remarkable animal can hide in disguise. (7)

21 See 1 down

22 A long drawn-out speech. (5)

24 Short statement in passing? (4)

This puzzle originally appeared in the July 5, 1975, issue.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1591

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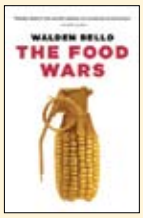

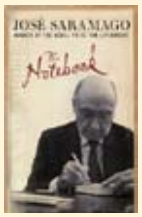

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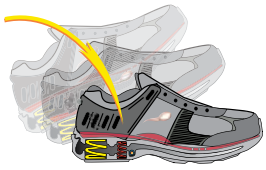

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REBOUND PROPELS YOU FORWARD
Reduce fatigue. Be more active

SPRING LOADED SPORTSWEAR

...Stop Imagining

Walk and run faster, jump higher, no fatigue and no more pain!

gdefy SPRING TECHNOLOGY FOOTWEAR

Should G-Defy be banned from Athletic Competition?

They might be considered an unfair advantage.

Genesis of Athletic Excellence

Elevate your game to the next level. Feel the drive, the inspiration, the energy as you slip your feet into the most exhilarating shoes in the world! Go from the weekend warrior to the daily champion at your gym and on the street.

Versoshock™ Trampoline Technology

Within 10 days of regular use, the special combination of space age rubber and lightweight, durable springs will adjust to your activities and begin to improve your overall comfort. Give your whole body a break from the stress of your high impact life and experience breakthroughs in your athletic lifestyle. Be in action. Be unstoppable. Be comfortable and live pain free.

Great News for the Overweight?

Extra weight puts an added toll on your bones and joints. Running isn't an option, and walking can become difficult. G-Defy Shoes will take the pressure from your large frame body, make you more active and change your life forever!

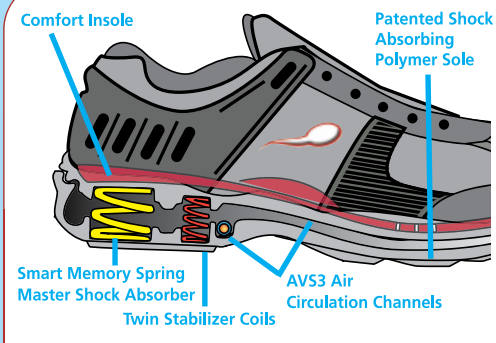
Ease Joint Pain!

You will notice immediate relief of common pain during exercise as the springs of G-Defy athletic shoes absorb most of the impact --instead of your body-- by easing the stress on your joints, back and neck while walking, running, or jumping.

- Relieve all pains
- Ease joint & spine pressure
- Reduce fatigue & tiredness
- Be more active
- Have more energy
- Appear taller
- Jump higher, walk and run faster
- Have instant comfort
- Cool your feet & reduce foot odor
- Elevate your performance

85%	90%	87%	91%
Ankle & foot pain gone	Exercise 20% longer w/ no fatigue	4 out of 5 purchase another pair within 3 mos.	Most comfortable shoe ever owned

Clinical Study Results


Comfort Insole
Patented Shock Absorbing Polymer Sole
Smart Memory Spring Master Shock Absorber
Twin Stabilizer Coils
AVS3 Air Circulation Channels

100% Satisfaction Guaranteed, Nothing to Lose --but your pain.
30 Day Money Back Guarantee. If not satisfied, send them back for a full refund of purchase price.

~~$129.95~~ **$119.95** with coupon code

TB902MWBS Men's Silver and Navy Blue sizes 7.5 - 13.0 widths M/W, & XW/XX

TB902FWBS Women's Silver and Navy Blue sizes 6.0 - 11.0 widths M/W, & XW/XX

Try them FREE for 30 Days!
Your credit card will not be billed.
(Offer not available with debit card purchases)

Order your G-Defy Athletic Shoes today for only $119.95 (You save $10) at www.gdefy.com/MD9FBU or call (800) 429-0039 and mention offer code: MD9FBU

gravity defyer™
VERSOSHOCK TRAMPOLINE TECHNOLOGY

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